



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 42.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL AND THE BOY TRAILER

OR
AFTER KIDNAPPERS IN KANSAS



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
'BUFFALO BILL'

BEFORE THE YOUNG RANCHERO COULD DRAW HIS WEAPON HE WAS LOOKING INTO THE MUZZLE OF BUFFALO BILL'S REVOLVER



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AFTER KIDNAPPERS IN KANSAS.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I. THE KIDNAPER.

One pleasant afternoon toward the hour of sunset, two persons were riding slowly over a Kansas prairie, evidently with the intention of resting their horses, which had been hard driven the last few miles.

Both were well mounted upon fiery mustangs, wiry in build, and displaying speed and bottom in their action.

One of the riders was a young girl of perhaps nineteen, dressed in a gray riding habit, which fitted her form to perfection.

She wore a soft sombrero, encircled by a silver cord, and with a black plume in it, pinned in its place by a pair of small gold cavalry sabers, crossed.

Her companion was a lad of fourteen, with sun-browned, fearless face, and a look of mischief in his dark eyes—one who looked as though he might use well the rifle at his back, or revolver in his belt.

He was dressed in buckskin leggings, moccasins, hunting shirt of flannel, and wore a light-colored slouch hat, with the tail of a wolf serving in the place of a plume, while he also rode with the perfect ease of one at home in the saddle.

"We have made a long circuit, Brad, and it will be after nightfall before we reach the ranch; but if you are certain you saw the Reds in the timber I do not regret it, for I would not fall into their clutches for the world," said the maiden.

"Cousin Belle, I saw distinctly the Reds, and there were seven of them. You had stopped to tie up your hair, and I rode slowly on over the hill, and saw them in the timber, though I do not think they saw me, and I at once rode back and told you, and it is best that we came round the way we did to avoid them," answered the boy.

"By all means, Brad, and it was lucky you discovered them; but do you believe that Kent Ken-

nard belongs to that desperado band of Red Rangers, as that scout I sent with a letter to Buffalo Bill said?"

"I don't know, Cousin Belle; but I think that Captain Kennard is bad enough to belong to anything, and I'd rather kill him than see you marry him, as uncle says you must."

"Ah, me, my brave little cousin; I fear that it must be, unless it can be proven that Kent Kennard is a Red," sighed the maiden.

"But you believe Buffalo Bill will save you?"

"Yes, if he can; the letter that Jack brought me last night said that he would come to my aid."

"His plan will be to dog the steps of Kennard, and get a clew to work on, and then capture him and his band, if he is indeed captain of the Reds."

"And they will come soon, cousin?"

"If they are not here in three days, Brad, I must marry Kent Kennard, for I do not see how it can be prevented."

Glancing back, young Brad Buckner saw a horseman coming in a gallop behind them, and rapidly overtaking them.

"There comes the devil," growled the boy.

"What do you mean, Brad?" cried Belle Bradford, reining in her horse.

"It's Kent Kennard!"

"Oh!" and the maiden's face grew pale, in spite of the rosy hue that exercise had flushed her with.

"Let us ride fast."

"No, Brad, for I dare not do so."

"I will go slow and let him come up," and in a few moments more a horseman rode alongside of the maiden, and said pleasantly:

"Well, Miss Belle, I have had a long chase after you, for I was in the timber with a few of my ranchero friends, when I saw you turn back."

"We thought you were Reds," she said, coldly.

The horseman laughed, while the boy said:

"If you mean the Dead Man's Motte is where you were, those I saw there had the masks on of the Reds."

"That is your vivid imagination, Brad, my boy," was the laughing response of the man.

He was certainly an attractive-looking personage, dressed with a richness seemingly out of place on the border, for he wore a black velvet jacket, a snowy flannel shirt, the collar turned over a blue silk

scarf, and his white corduroy pants were stuck in the tops of elegant cavalry boots.

He had gauntlet gloves upon his hands, a gray sombrero sat jauntily upon his head, and his spurs, weapons, saddle and bridle were of the richest manufacture, and silver-mounted.

Deviltry and virtue were most strangely blended in his countenance.

His lips expressed daring recklessness, vice and cunning, while his eyes were full of touching sadness in repose, and of burning defiance in excitement.

As a man about town, a soldier, a plainsman, he would attract attention ranging between admiration and fear.

"Do you ride our way, Captain Kennard?" asked Belle Bradford, coldly, as the man rode up to her side.

"Yes, for I was going to the ranch to see you," was the answer.

"I was in hopes I would escape any attention on your part, Captain Kennard, until the day appointed for——"

As she paused he added, with a smile:

"The sacrifice you would say; for it seems to almost break your heart to become my wife."

"I do not love you, sir."

"But I love you, Belle Bradford, and, as I am aware that you are trying to escape me, I will not await the day appointed for our marriage, but will take you into my keeping now, so that there will be no getting out of it on your part."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Belle Bradford, quivering with anger and dread.

"Simply that you cannot escape if I hold you safe, and I shall keep you a prisoner up to the time you become my wife."

"After you are Mrs. Kennard you can return to your uncle's ranch and live, but not before, so you must come with me, and allow that boy to go home alone, and tell that you are in my care now."

"I'll kill you first, Kent Kennard," cried Brad Buckner, and the brave boy brought his revolver at a level and pulled the trigger.

But the cap snapped, and the man laughed, while he reached forward and grasped the rein of the maiden's bridle, at the same time remarking:

"Your weapons are not loaded, Brad, nor are yours, my fair Belle, for an ally of mine saw to that

before you left the ranch, else that boy would have killed me."

"I will kill you yet!" cried Brad, his eyes filling with tears.

"Silence, boy! and go your way back to the ranch ere I hold you, too.

"Say to Major Buckner that I hold his niece my prisoner until our wedding day, when she can return.

"Now be off, before I attempt to do you harm!"

And the eyes of Kent Kennard fairly blazed with anger.

"Go, Brad, my dear little cousin, for you can do nothing to save me, and I must meet my fate.

"Go, and tell Uncle Dick and mother all.

"Good-by."

And, as the boy rode near, she grasped his hand, and, bending from her saddle, kissed him.

The boy could utter no word; his heart was full, his face writhing with suffering and anger, for he saw that his weapons had all been tampered with; so, with a groan, he wheeled his horse and dashed away like an arrow across the prairie, leaving Belle Bradford in the power of her kidnaper.

Straight as the crow flies went Brad Buckner, the frontier boy, to the ranch where he dwelt with his father, aunt and cousin, the latter now, to his deep sorrow, in the clutches of a man whom she hated, and whom all appeared to fear.

When he should make his story known of the kidnapping of his beautiful cousin, what could be done to save her?

His father, an old United States Army officer, retired to a life on a Kansas ranch, had but a few cattlemen to aid him in the rescue of the maiden, even if he dared to make the attempt, which the boy believed doubtful; for, young as he was, he had seen and heard enough to know that Kent Kennard, through some reason, held the winning hand at the Buckner ranch.

There was some secret; what, little Brad did not know; but it was enough to make Captain Kennard the master, and his father, aunt and cousin the slaves of the holder of the secret.

"If father does not take Cousin Belle away from that man, then I will do what I can to save her from him, if I have to go to Texas and tell her lover, Captain Reynolds, of the Rangers, to come and help

me," said Brad Buckner, as he urged his mustang homeward at full speed.

Soon the sun went down, twilight came, and darkness would have followed, but for the moon rising into the clear skies and sending her golden light upon all.

Speeding along toward a group of dark shadows, with lights glimmering here and there, denoting a clump of timber and a ranch, the boy's eyes fell suddenly upon a horseman coming over the rise of the prairie not far distant.

"Ho, lad! What's ther matter?" called out a familiar voice, just as the boy, knowing his weapons were useless, was about to dash away in flight, for Reds were filling his mind just then, and he expected to see one behind every bush.

"Oh, Jack! It is you?" and Brad dashed up to the horseman.

It was Jack, the bearer of the letter to Buffalo Bill from Belle Bradford, and a man whose life from boyhood, almost, had been passed upon the prairies and in the Indian camps.

He was a perfect trailer, an experienced guide, understood redskin nature, and bold as a lion, always ready to serve a friend or meet a foe.

"It's me, boy, and I seen yer coming like a skeert coyote afore sunset, for I was over yonder on ther timber hill; but what are up?"

"Jack, that villain, Kent Kennard, has got Cousin Belle a prisoner."

"No!"

"Yes; we went out for a ride this afternoon, and on our way back to the ranch I saw a number of horsemen in some timber, so we dodged back and made a circle of miles, as I distinctly saw red masks upon their faces."

"Reds, sartin, boy."

"Yes, and I therefore wished to avoid them; but soon after Kent Kennard came galloping after us, and he told Cousin Belle that he would take her away with him and make her his wife, as he had heard that she meant to escape him."

"No! Then he's got on to my going to Buffalo Bill?"

"I don't know; but I tried to shoot him, and my cap snapped."

"Durn ther cap!" growled Jack.

"He had some one at the ranch who had drawn

the loads out of my weapons, and from Cousin Belle's revolver, too, Jack."

"The satan! Did he do that?"

"Yes, and so I came away to tell of her capture, for I could do nothing to save her."

"I only wish your pistol hed gone off, boy, and thar would hev been one man less on this prairie to-night."

"But let us see what is ter be did."

"Where are you going, Jack?"

"I had just concluded a leetle business settlement hereabouts, and were going to the army to jine Buffalo Bill, as he hev engaged me now."

"Can't we do something to save Cousin Belle from that wicked man, Jack?"

"I'll do what I kin, boy; but yer see no one man and a leetle boy, plucky as a wildcat though he is, can't do nothin' ag'in Captain Kennard."

"He is but one man."

"He's all that, and a leetle more than most men, boy; but I feel sartin he are cap'n o' ther Reds, and they is not ter be fooled with onless yer has ther grip on 'em."

"Now, as I said, I were startin' on ther trail fer Buffalo Bill's army camp, and I is free to believe that the pards he told me he were to bring here to help the gal is on ther way, and I'll jist take a trail to meet 'em."

"And I can go with you, Jack?"

"No, leetle pard, for you must go to the ranch and tell yer pa and auntie what hev become of your cousin, and I'll talk over the matter with Buffalo Bill."

"He will save her if any one can."

"Right you are, leetle pard. Bill are a man thet goes to ther end o' a trail ef he strikes in onc't, be it ever so long, and ever so red, and ef Kent Kennard hev harmed the lady, then he'll suffer fer it, or I is lyin'."

"Now, boy pard, go to ther ranch and rest easy, for I'll make it my biz to find Buffalo Bill and tell him jist what Kent Kennard hev done, and ef he are one o' ther Red Rangers, I bets all ther pelts I hopes to git thet Buffalo Bill finds it out, and necks will be stretched."

"Well, Jack, I will go on to the ranch, and tell father and auntie that you are going to do all you can for Cousin Belle."

"Good-by, Jack, and tell Buffalo Bill to look me

up, if I can help him, for you know I am acquainted with the trails about here."

"I know it, boy, and you bet I'll tell him about you."

"Now I'll be off," and the two separated, the boy riding rapidly on toward the ranch in the distant timber, and Jack heading his horse northward and jogging along at an easy gait.

Suddenly he drew rein, for his practiced ear caught a sound upon the prairie.

"It's ther tramp o' hoofs, and iron-shod at that, so they hain't Injuns," he muttered.

"They has halted, too, and I guess it's because they heerd ther hoof-falls o' my horse."

"They hes sharp ears in thet party, and I wouldn't wonder ef it were Buffalo Bill and his pards."

"Leastways, I has ter be partick'ler," and he listened attentively, while he gazed straight ahead of him, to catch sight of any object that might be upon the prairie.

In a little while he moved on again, and he had gone but a short distance when very quickly he came to a halt, with the uncomplimentary remark:

"Well, I'll be traded off fer a fool afore I dies!"

What had brought him to a halt was at suddenly beholding a horse and rider rise out of the grass before him, where both had been lying prostrate.

Nor was this all, for upon either side others appeared, and, glancing hastily behind him, Jack discovered that he had calmly ridden into a trap.

"Well! I knows I hain't in danger, fer it are Buffalo Bill and his pards, but ef it wasn't, I'd hev been in fer it, sartin, fer they seen me sooner as I seen them, and I rid straight fer 'em, same as ef I was a born greenhorn o' ther city."

Having delivered this soliloquy, and seeing that the horsemen were closing in upon him, he continued:

"There's nine o' 'em, and I'll jist wait and let 'em corral me."

In a short while the nine men, who had stretched out V-shaped, closed in on the hunter, and as they drew near, Jack called out:

"How is yer, pard Bill, and is I ther game you is corralin'?"

"Jack, how are you, for I know your voice among a thousand."

"Why didn't you shout out who you were?" and

Buffalo Bill rode up to the side of the hunter, who answered:

"I were just on ther hunt for yer, Buffalo Bill, and heerd yer hoof-falls; but it seems yer ears was better than mine, so you jist laid for me."

"We saw you before we heard you, Jack, so spread out for you to walk into the trap; but you know the boys I have with me, and we have come on a little business, which you are aware of. Have you any news?"

"Yas."

"Well, out with it."

"You is a leetle behind time, Buffalo Bill, fer ther leddy were tuk in some hours ago."

"Ah! captured?"

"Yas."

"By whom?"

"Ther king o' satans, Kent Kennard."

"Did he force her to marry him?"

"Thet are further along, I guesses, but he did not wait until ther time were up."

"No, for according to the letter received, we had three days yet before the appointed time; but tell me, Jack, all that you know of this Kent Kennard?"

"Waal, Bill, he were a guerrilla in the Southern war, they says, and come here to Kansas and went ter ranchin'.

"He were a lover of ther gal's, I has hern, long ago, but she wouldn't hev him, and so he's made life unpleasant for her, and somehow her uncle seems ter favor his marryin' her.

"Now, he are a howlin' terror, Bill, and don't you make a mistake that he hain't, fer he are grit clean through.

"He's got a good ranch, and plenty o' cattle; but they do say as how he is cap'n o' ther band o' outlaws known hereabout as the Red Rangers, and ef he are, he should hang, for a more thievin' set o' devils never lived on ther perarer than is thet gang.

"They hes ther secret camp in ther hills, and ther way they works is a caution, fer they drifts inter ther ranch country one by one, lays ther traps ter rob, and then, meetin' some night, does ther job slick and gits away with ther plunder, while they allus leaves ther startin' o' a new graveyard ahind them!"

"We have all heard of the Reds, Jack; but how many of them are there in the band?"

"Some say a dozen, others fifty, but I guesses you

had better divide fifty by two, and you'll git near ther number."

"And we are nine."

"Yas, Bill, but you is ther durndest nine thet could be picked out fer a leetle scrimmage, and I wouldn't feel uneasy and lose my appetite about yer, ef I heerd as how yer hed tackled ther whole lay-out o' Reds.

"But yer knows all I kin tell yer now, 'ceptin' thet Cap'n Kennard's ranch lies jist ten miles from here over ther hill slope o' ther river, and it are as strong as a young fort.

"Ther gal's home are fifteen mile to ther south from this pint, and ther place whar Kent captured her is yonder, five miles as ther crow flies, whar thar is a timber motte known as ther Nine Trees."

"A good starting point for our nine, Jack; but I thank you, and if you start us on the trail, we'll go to the end of it."

"I'll bet yer does, Bill, fer it's in yer and ther boys yer hes with yer."

"Luck, pards," cried Jack, while the scouts dashed off over the moonlit prairie to strike the trail of Kent Kennard at the Nine Trees, that stood like a group of hunters at bay in the midst of the plains.

CHAPTER II.

THE DENIAL.

The Buckner ranch was one of the pleasantest and most comfortable houses on the Kansas border.

It was delightfully located, in some timber-land upon the banks of a stream, and about it were a few sheltering hills, with the prairies stretching around in almost boundless expanse.

Major Buckner had been a brave Union soidier, and had settled at the close of the war in Kansas, on the very spot of wild lands where he had built and fortified a fort, to keep at bay the roving bands of Indians, and as a depot of supplies.

The fort, being deserted when the war ended, the major had turned it into his ranch, homesteading the lands thereabout, and thither had come his sister and her daughter, Belle Bradford, to make their home with him.

To the same region soon after had come to settle Kent Kennard, and it was very evident that Belle Bradford had been the star that had guided him to an abiding-place in the land of the setting sun.

That there was no love for Kent Kennard in the heart of the young maiden was evident, and yet there was a "skeleton in the closet" of the Buckner-Bradford household, which the young ranchero seemed to have the key to unlock, for he possessed a power over Major Buckner and Mrs. Bradford which seemed to hold them as in chains of iron, and thus did he force from them an unwilling consent that Belle should become his wife upon a given date.

In the sitting-room of the spacious cabin, known from its army associations as Headquarters Ranch, sat Major Buckner and Mrs. Bradford, his sister.

The former was a man of fifty, with a military air and a resolute face, full of kindness, while his sister resembled him closely, but wore a look of sorrow and anxiety commingled.

"Oh, if we could avert this sorrow from poor Belle I would be happy, brother," said Mrs. Bradford, laying down her sewing and turning to the major, who moved uneasily, frowned, and then said:

"Alas, Mary, I fear it cannot be done, for to anger Kent Kennard is to precipitate sorrow and trouble upon us.

"He seems, withal, a pleasant fellow, yet he is not one I would select for Belle's husband, for he threatened at once, when I told him I did not wish her to marry, and I do not like a man who threatens one.

"But the stories about his being a Red I cannot believe, and he laughs at the accusation, and is sincere in his denials; but he loves Belle, he has money, and I hope will make her a good husband."

"God grant it; but how late she and Brad stay out to-night."

"The moon is up, and they are enjoying their ride—there they come now," and the rattle of hoofs was heard without.

"That is but one horse, brother; oh! what if some harm has befallen my child!"

As the mother spoke the door opened and in strode the boy, Brad Buckner.

His face showed that something had happened, and in breathless suspense Major Buckner and Mrs. Bradford listened to the kidnapping of Belle, and what had followed.

"This is an outrage on the part of Kennard, and I will at once hasten over to his ranch and demand that he give up my niece," and Major Buckner's face flushed with anger.

In a few moments, accompanied by Brad, who in-

sisted upon going, and two cowboys, he rode away from the ranch, and at a rapid gallop started for the home of Kent Kennard, distant some dozen miles.

A ride of an hour and a half brought them to the Kennard ranch, and a servant, an old negress, told the major that:

"Massa Kent done gone 'way in de artemoon, and hain't comed back yit.

"Guess he'd gone to der willage," she added.

So to the village rode the major and his party.

Now, this village was little more than a camp, for it was on the Colorado trail, and, being the halting-place of westward and eastward bound trains, did quite a flourishing business, while it was also patronized by the surrounding settlers and cattlemen.

A straggling street along the river bank, several taverns, a score of saloons, a dozen stores, a hundred or two cabins, as many tents and shanties, one large building serving as a courthouse, public hall and theatre during the week, and as a church on Sunday, made up the village of Prairie City.

It was a hard place, and its citizens were a hard crowd, lawless and desperate in the extreme, and given to gambling, horse racing, target shooting and drinking as the sports best suited to their tastes, while all points of dispute were settled by the revolver, rifle or bowie-knife.

The principal inn in the place was also the fashionable saloon and gambling hall, and its rooms were almost constantly occupied by gentlemen who were suffering from wounds received in private and public encounters at the card table or bar.

The tavern boasted of the name of the Overland Hotel.

A large hallway, in which was the office, a dining-room on one side, a barroom and gambling den on the other side, a log kitchen in the rear, and above the stairs the bedrooms, some sixty in number, constituted the "Overland Hotel," and if any "guest" therein managed to sleep, amid the hubbub below stairs, he was either deaf as a post, prostrated by fatigue, or inured to such tumultuous scenes.

It was to the Overland in Prairie City that Major Buckner wended his way, after leaving the ranch of Captain Kennard, for he hoped to find him there, expecting that he had sought the place to force the timid little parson dwelling there into marrying him to Belle Bradford.

Making inquiry of the landlord—just such a per-

sonage as the Overland needed for one," indignantly he was a huge fellow, armed to the teeth, and capable of holding his own in a crowd—he learned that Captain Kennard was then playing cards in the saloon.

"How long has he been here, Sands?" he asked.

"All the afternoon, major, and playin' a winnin' hand, too."

"Who is with him?"

"No one, as I knows about."

"Did he not bring a lady here?"

"No, major; he didn't."

Major Buckner looked troubled, but turned toward the gambling-hall, after telling Brad and the two cowboys to wait for him.

He was well known in that country, and respected as a brave man, and a good one, so as he entered the room many spoke pleasantly to him.

It was a large room, and it was crowded with men, some playing cards at numerous little tables, and smoking pipes and drinking, others standing in groups looking on, and a large force ranged in front of the bar that was at one end of the saloon.

Certainly it was a strange gathering, for men were there as desperate as wolves at bay, and human life was strangely at a discount amid that wild, reckless crowd.

In one corner of the room a larger group than usual surrounded a table, and, after a glance about him, Major Buckner walked over to this spot and was face to face with Kent Kennard, who sat playing for large stakes with three others, from whom he was winning with phenomenal good luck.

"Kennard, when you play out your hand I wish to see you," said the major, quietly.

"Hallo, major; glad to see you. Will you take a hand with us?" said Kent Kennard, in his free-and-easy way.

"No, sir, for I have more important business on hand than gambling, so I wish to see you at once."

Perhaps it was the major's manner that nettled Kennard, for his face flushed, and he replied coldly:

"I am busy, sir, and will be as long as these gentlemen are willing to continue the game, so what business you have with me make it known here, for, Major Buckner, I have no secrets I wish to hide."

Major Buckner turned deadly pale, for he felt the allusion to hiding a secret was a hit at the "skeleton in his family closet," of which Kennard knew;

but he kept down his anger, feeling that he was in the man's power, and said:

"Kennard, as you wish me to speak out, may I ask where my niece is?"

"Your niece?" and the gambler dropped his cards in surprise.

"Yes, you understand me."

"Upon my word, I do not."

"Did you not meet my niece upon the prairie this afternoon, near sunset, and——"

"No, sir, I did not see your niece this afternoon," was the prompt reply.

"Kent Kennard, I do not wish to throw the lie in your teeth, but I have proof that you did meet my niece, and more, that you kidnaped her."

A breathless silence was now upon all, for every eye was turned upon Major Buckner and Kent Kennard.

The former stood near the table, upright, white-faced and quivering with inward emotion, while the latter still kept his seat, one hand upon the table, the other below it, and a look of intense surprise was upon his strangely handsome face.

"Major Buckner, did I not believe you to be the victim of some cruel hoax, I would slap your face, sir, for giving me the lie, when I tell you that I have not seen your niece to-day."

The major looked at the speaker an instant, as though he would read his inmost soul, and then he glanced at the faces about him and said, addressing a red-headed specimen of a prairie-man:

"Brindle, will you go out to the office and ask my little boy to come in here?"

"I'll do it, major," and, amid a breathless silence, he left the room, and a moment after returned, accompanied by Brad.

The entrance of Brindle, leading little Brad Buckner by the hand, created a sensation in the gambling saloon of the Overland.

Bad as was Prairie City, no boy had ever entered its gambling saloons, and, though Brad came there as a witness, and not as a player, it did not allay the suppressed excitement.

There were not many children in those days upon that wild and lawless border, and the sight of the boy brought memories of bygone days surging into the heart of many a rude man who saw him.

Some of those memories were doubtless sad, for they recalled from a buried past the face of a loved

child, and others maybe were bitter recollections what might have been to many had not their pathways led them adown the road to sin, instead of up the hillside to honor.

Here and there, as the fearless-faced boy moved forward, a tear arose into the eyes of stern-faced men, and one said audibly:

"God bless the handsome boy!"

He had doubtless thought his prayer aloud, for he dropped his head when his words brought the eyes of his companions upon him, though not one sneered at him for what had sprung involuntarily from his heart.

There was a face seen in the crowd, as he went along, that Brad recognized as having met before, and he nodded pleasantly as his eyes rested upon it.

Then he caught sight of his father, as the crowd opened for him, and beheld Kent Kennard facing him, still seated at the table, and with a reckless smile resting upon his lips.

"Here are ther little pard, major, an' he are a game one ter look at," said Brindle, as he led the boy forward, adding:

"Yer kin hold onter my han', boy pard, fer I likes ther feel o' yourn, as it reminds me o' ther grip o' a leetle gal I used ter know afore licker got ther drop on me."

No one laughed at Brindle Ben for his words, for, somehow, the scene was an impressive one, and the boy's presence seemed to hold a check upon all.

"You wanted me, father?" said Brad, and his voice was heard by all in the hall.

"Yes, my son, for I have given Captain Kent Kennard the lie to his face, and it is upon your word that I have done so," said the major.

"Well, father?" asked Brad, not exactly understanding the situation.

"Captain Kennard denies that he has seen your cousin, Belle, to-day."

"Then I, too, give him the lie!" came in the ringing voice of the boy, and his eyes flashed fire, as he turned them upon Kent Kennard, while the room rang with the shout of applause at the defiant words of Brad Buckner.

But Kent Kennard did not move, nor his face change a muscle.

He showed no sign that he had heard the applause, or that the boy had insulted him; but, waiting until a dead silence came again, he said:

"You say that I have met your cousin to-day?"

"Because I tell the truth; you tell a lie."

"Be careful, boy, for I do not like epithets cast in my face; but tell me when and where I saw her?"

"Upon the prairie, not far from the Nine Tree Motte, just at sunset, when you came up with Cousin Belle and myself upon the prairie, and took her away from me!"

"Boy, you are mad, for I have not met you for days," and Kent Kennard's face certainly showed intense surprise.

"I say you have."

"And I say you are mistaken, for I will not give you the lie."

"You have mistaken some one else for me, and if Miss Belle has been captured, I will be the first to go on the trail of her captors, I assure you."

"Captain Kennard, you try to deceive my father and these men, but you cannot fool me, for I leveled my revolver at you, the cap snapped, and you said that you had an ally at the ranch who had drawn the charges from the weapons of Cousin Belle and myself."

"Do you deny that?"

"I do!"

Do you deny that you told my cousin that you knew that she was planning to escape from marrying you, and that you meant to hold her a prisoner until she was your wife, after which she might return home, and you bade me tell my father?"

"I do deny it," was the firm response.

"Oh! Kent Kennard! You would deny your mother and your God!" cried the boy, in a voice that was most impressive.

The accused half-sprung to his feet, his hand dropping upon his revolver, but a swaying movement of the throng about him warned him that he was at bay against the crowd.

So he sank back in his chair, and said, in a voice that certainly seemed sincere:

"Major Buckner, you have brought your boy as proof that I kidnaped your niece, and you certainly have trained him well to carry out the accusation; but I deny it. I deny all that he says, and the accusation against me is utterly false, as I can prove."

"Where is your proof, sir?" sternly said the major, bewildered slightly by the seemingly honest manner of the accused.

"Father he has no better proof than my eyes, Kent more, Cousin Belle is certainly gone," indignantly said Brad.

"My proof, Major Buckner, I might insist should be simply my word as a gentlemtn; but as my accuser is your son, a boy, and you need more than my word offers, I will ask these gentlemen if I have not been gambling here since early in the afternoon, and certainly I cannot be in two places at the same time."

"That's what bothers me, for I think the boy means what he says, pard major; but, then, since two o'clock I have sat right here losin' money ter Cap'n Kennard, and I knows he hain't been away, let alone ten miles off ter ther Nine Tree Timber," said one of the gamblers.

"Father, this is a game that Captain Kennard has arranged to play," urged Brad.

"No, my boy, the cap'n says truly, fer he has been right here, as a dozen and more kin prove, so you are simply mistaken," remarked a storekeeper who was engaged in the game of cards with Kennard.

"Mistaken in that man! Why, there's not another like him on the border," cried Brad.

"Still you are off the trail this time, my boy," said another.

"Can it be that you are mistaken, my son?"

"Father, did he not tell Cousin Belle that he would keep her prisoner until he married her, and laugh at me when my cap snapped? Did he not tell me to go to the ranch and let you know what he had done, and is there another man that I could mistake for Captain Kennard?"

"I know of no one," said the major, deeply puzzled.

"There hain't none, as you says, boy pard, like him; but I recalls now thet ther cap'n hev been right here, and no mistake," put in Brindle.

"I am not mistaken, for Kent Kennard stole my cousin from me this afternoon, for I know him well—his dress, his horse, his voice; and I tell you he is the man, for who else could have known about the intended marriage, and that Cousin Belle was trying to escape from being his wife, for she hates him, and he knows it, and yet he would force her to marry him."

The dark face of Kent Kennard flushed at the words of the boy, alluding to the hatred of Belle Bradford for him; but he kept his temper and said:

"Major Buckner, I am glad that you believe that

My son is mistaken, after all the proof you have heard, for there are men here whom you cannot doubt, as they have nothing to gain, nothing to lose by what they say.

"The boy is either mistaken, or he is playing a part to get me into trouble with the crowd, well knowing the excitable nature of a border gathering, and, but for proofs of innocence, he would have succeeded.

"As it is, I do not think that any one present believes his assertion now," and Kent Kennard glanced over the crowd of faces before him.

Not a man spoke.

"As for you, sir, I give you my sympathy in the loss of your niece, and, as she is pledged to be my wife, it shall be my duty to at once make search for her, and punish her abductor, at the same time showing young Brad here that he has falsely accused me."

"I have not! You are the guilty man, Kent Kennard!" rang out clear from the boy's lips.

"No, no, boy! You are wrong!" cried a number of voices, followed by:

"He hain't guilty this time, leetle pard!"

"He's been right here all ther arternoon!"

"Ther boy is off ther trail, sartin!"

"It were some other feller got ther gal!"

"Either that, or the boy has been put up to accuse me and get me killed!" came in stern tones from Kent Kennard.

"Pard cap'n, I guesses you is right, for we all knows ther boy is wrong," cried one of the men who had been gambling with Kennard.

"I say the boy is right, and I am here to prove my words. That man is a villain!"

Like a bombshell the words of the speaker fell upon all, and as he strode to the side of the boy a voice rang out clear and startling:

"Look out, pards! That man is Buffalo Bill, and he means business when he takes sides with thet boy!"

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY UNSOLVED.

The name of Buffalo Bill was well known from Texas to Dakota, for he had won fame as a soldier, a scout, hunter, guide and Indian fighter, while he had proven in many a personal encounter forced upon him, that he was a man to be as dreaded as was death.

No one had seen him enter the Overland gambling saloon, so occupied were all in the scene between the boy, Brad Buckner, and the man, Kent Kennard.

He had glided into the room as silent as a spectre, edged his way toward the center of excitement, and had spoken the words that so startled the crowd and caused a general swaying of those nearest to him, when one, who recognized the tall form and stern, daring face, called in a warning voice:

"Look out, pards! that man is Buffalo Bill!"

A cry of joy broke from the boy's lips, for he knew the secret of his cousin, Belle; but he at once controlled himself, determined as he was that no one else, through him, should find out that friends were near to save the maiden from the fate that Kent Kennard had forced upon her.

"Buffalo Bill! And the ally of my son!" said Major Buckner, in a wondering way.

"Buffalo Bill! and he sides with that boy!" came in a hiss from Kent Kennard's lips.

And he dropped his hands upon his revolver.

But, quick as a flash, he was covered with Buffalo Bill's revolver, and he knew full well the deadly aim of the man he had to deal with, while stern came the words:

"Hold! Hands off that toy, unless you wish to die!"

Kent Kennard was no coward, nor was he a fool, and he accepted the situation, and laid his hands before him on the table, while he demanded in his cool way:

"Well, sir, why do you interfere here?"

"I dropped in, pard, overheard the boy's story, took the idea that you lied and he told the truth, so I sided with him and shall see him through; so open the ball if you don't like my chipping into your little game of deviltry."

And Buffalo Bill's smile was a grim and dangerous one.

"I don't like your chipping in, and I will be willing to prove it when I am not held at a disadvantage, as I am now."

"Why, pard, I am a stranger here, looking for a place to hang my hat for the night, and came in to enjoy a little game before saying my prayers and crawling into my little bed; but I won't see the boy harmed, I assure you."

"His father is here with him."

"That may be, and the old man's hair is gray, and

appear to have blinded him with your words; but the boy can see through you, and I side with him, and am ready to back him with gold, lead or steel."

"Do you play?"

There was something grand in the one man standing there, his back turned to the wall, his hands resting upon his revolvers, and his eyes flashing calm defiance over every face that met his own.

Had his name not been well known, he would have at once been set upon by those hangers-on of the place, anxious to curry favor with the ranchero, for whatever it might bring them.

But, as it was, not a man moved to force the fight, and Buffalo Bill held the winning hand by his very boldness.

"Who are you?" demanded Kent Kennard, in an insolent tone.

"Years ago I was christened William F. Cody, but on the border men call me Buffalo Bill. Perhaps you may have heard the name?"

There was no bravado in the words or the tone; he simply answered the question he had been asked.

"Yes, I have heard of you as a desperado of the frontier," returned Kent Kennard.

"Yes, those who do not know me call me so; but men call you 'Captain of the Red Rangers'—are you?"

"Curse you! you insult me because you have the power."

"I find you in the midst of your friends, while I do not behold one face friendly to me here."

"But, come, let us not quarrel, but decide this matter regarding your kidnaping the young lady, as this boy says you have."

"Do you mean to force yourself in as a judge on this case?"

"I do!—judge, jury and executioner, too, if need be!" was the reply, amid a silence that was deathlike.

Then, turning to the boy, he continued:

"Come, little pard, tell your story, just as it occurred."

Brad was with difficulty suppressing his delight, and in a few words told of his ride with his cousin, the discovery of the men with the masked faces of the Reds in the Dead Man's Motte, and what followed after Kent Kennard had overtaken his cousin and himself.

There were those present who believed the boy,

and yet there were those who asserted that Kent Kennard had not been away from the Overland all the afternoon.

"You say that this boy's story is false?"

And Buffalo Bill turned to Kent Kennard.

"I most emphatically do."

"Why should the boy lie?"

"It is a plot against me, because the girl does not wish to be my wife."

"Yet you would marry a woman that hates you?"

"With my actions you have nothing to do, Buffalo Bill."

"I assume the right, sir; but why, instead of a plot against you, is it not your plot to get the girl and prove by false witnesses that the boy has lied?"

"Do you accuse these gentlemen of speaking falsely?" asked Kent Kennard, quickly, anxious to bring into the quarrel those who had asserted his innocence, that he might have a chance to escape from beneath the fiery eye of his accuser.

"I say that it is more likely you have paid men to swear in your favor, than that this boy should be in a plot against you."

"Pardon me, sir, but as you do not know some of us who assert Captain Kennard's innocence, let me assure you I am not one to be bribed, nor are others here. Frankly, I do not like Captain Kennard, nor do I trust him; but I know he has not been away from this saloon for the past ten hours, and the kidnapping, as I understand it, of Miss Bradford was some four hours ago."

The speaker was a man whose face and manner carried truth with his words, for he was by no means a border ruffian, as Buffalo Bill saw at a glance.

Ever courteous, Buffalo Bill remarked in response:

"Your assertion carries weight with it, for I do not believe, sir, you are a man to lie to save a rascal."

"I am an army officer, sir, spending a short time in town to nurse my brother, who is in the hotel suffering from a severe wound received some weeks ago."

"I have seen this man, Kent Kennard, often, and I can assure you, bad as he may be, he is innocent of the charge made against him by this boy, for, deeply interested in the games played here, I have not been absent from the saloon more than ten minutes at a time all the afternoon. I am Captain

Arthur Tayloe, sir, of the Seventh Cavalry, now stationed at Fort Larned."

"I have heard of you, Captain Tayloe, and am glad to meet you, sir," said Buffalo Bill, turning toward the tall, fine-looking officer, who wore but a woollen hunting-shirt, corduroy pants and slouch hat in place of his uniform, and whom no one had suspected of being an army officer, though they had regarded him as no ordinary personage.

"And I am glad to meet you, Buffalo Bill, for I have often wished to do so; but I am particularly glad in this case to keep down trouble where you are in the wrong, for you are certainly mistaken, my little man," and Captain Tayloe turned to Brad, who promptly answered:

"No, sir, I am not mistaken; for it was Kent Kennard, and no other, that kidnaped my cousin Belle."

"Well, little pard, since we have the word of Captain Tayloe in favor of this man, there is a mystery connected with the whole affair, and I shall clear it up, I promise you."

"Your cousin has been captured, you say, by this man, and yet positive proof is given to the contrary; but I have seen worse tangles unraveled, and it shall be done. Gentlemen, one and all, join me in a drink," and Buffalo Bill raised his hat to the crowd, while, turning to Kent Kennard, he added:

"Of course, sir, I include you also."

"On one condition, sir," said Kent Kennard, coldly.

"Well, sir?"

"That you pledge yourself to give me satisfaction for the insults you have heaped upon me at any time I may demand it."

"With pleasure, sir; and more. As you seem to be largely a winner to-night at cards, I will give you the opportunity to try your luck against mine, and it may foreshadow which will be the loser in the game of death that one day must be played between us," and Buffalo Bill spoke in the easiest manner possible.

"As you please, sir; the game of life and death I have often played and won," and a sinister, cruel smile swept over the face of the handsome ranchero, as he stepped up to the bar to take his drink.

In the confusion of the moment Major Buckner and Brad slipped out of the saloon, and, mounting their horses, rode rapidly away from Prairie City, accompanied by the two cowboys.

"Ah, Brad, my son, you have made a great mistake, and I only hope it will not cause Kent Kennard to harm us," said the major.

"I have made no mistake, father; and how can he harm us more than he has in running off with poor Cousin Belle?"

"He has it in his power to do so, Brad; but more I cannot say, other than that you were mistaken in the man who kidnaped Belle."

"No, father, I am not mistaken; but it does seem strange that even that army officer, Captain Tayloe, would speak in favor of Kent Kennard."

"It is most mysterious, indeed, and I know not what to do."

"It is a mystery that will be solved, father, and soon, my word for it."

"But who will solve it, and who will save poor Belle?—for wretched indeed must she be!"

"Buffalo Bill," was the low response of the boy, as the two rode on over the moonlit prairie, their horses headed for the scene of the capture of Belle Bradford.

As the little party of four dropped the lights of Prairie City over a roll in the prairie, they saw a horseman before them, who suddenly came into full relief against the burnished sky.

"Who is that?" whispered the major, unconsciously pointing at the lone rider, and evidently startled at the seeming apparition.

Horse and rider were stationary as marble statues, and were directly on the trail.

The four riders had drawn rein, and silently surveyed the motionless horseman.

Was he one of the Reds? Was he a friend? Why was he there, in the night, and alone?

"There is only one, father," said the boy, noticing his father's excitement and the cowboys' evident trepidation.

"Yes, boy, only one; but it is strange. Why is he waiting there? Who is he? We must know. Be on your guard, boys. Now, forward!"

As they rode on again it was evident that the strange horseman noticed their approach.

Still, he did not swerve from his position directly in their path, and remained like one who held no fear of the four men advancing upon him.

"Be ready, boys, should he mean trouble," ordered the major, and on they rode, the strange horseman still as motionless as a statue.

Nearer and nearer they drew to him, until but a few paces divided them, and in the bright moonlight they saw him distinctly.

He sat his horse splendidly, wore a complete suit of buckskin, had a rifle slung at his back, and his hat shaded his face but little, revealing strongly-cut features, and his hair fell upon his broad shoulders.

Each hand rested upon a revolver, that was half-drawn from a holster on either side of the silver-studded horn of his Mexican saddle, and it was seen that he was ready for defense or attack, as might be necessary.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" he said, in a pleasant voice, as the party drew rein to a halt.

"Good-evening, sir, to you; and let me add that you are a bold man to let four persons ride upon you as you did, for we might have been other than we are," answered the major.

A light laugh, which showed the white teeth of the stranger, broke from his lips at the reply, and he said:

"My dear sir, I seldom count the odds in meeting men on the prairie. I was waiting here; you were coming on a trail that brought you near; so why should I give way until you forced me to do so, or I drove you off your path?"

"Who are you, for your face is strange in these parts?"

"Along the northern border I am called Texas Jack."

The major, the cowboys and Brad started at the name.

They knew it well, and that the owner had been noted for deeds of daring which seemed strangely like tales of fiction.

A short while before they had met a famous man of the border, and now here was one in their path known to be the friend of Buffalo Bill, and who, as Texas Jack, was almost equally dreaded by the outlaws of the frontier.

"I know you well by name, sir, and from all I have heard of you, I do not wonder that you held your ground against us," said the major.

"May I ask, sir, if you are from the town of Prairie City?"

"We left it a quarter of an hour ago."

"Did you meet one there, Buffalo Bill by name?"

"We did."

"Was he in danger?"

"Not in any danger, sir, that such a man cannot extricate himself from."

"I thank you, sir. Good-night, gentlemen!"

And Texas Jack bowed in a way that showed he wished to end the interview.

"Good-night, sir! My ranch lies yonder, ten miles away; and if you care to visit it, you will be welcome."

And Major Buckner rode on with his companions, leaving Texas Jack as before, horse and rider seeming like a statue.

"Well, Brad, what do you think of that?" asked the major.

"More mystery, father; but do not let us speak of seeing Texas Jack."

"Why not, my son?"

"I cannot tell you, sir; only it is best not to let it get about that he and Buffalo Bill are here on our prairie."

"My son, you have some motive for this, and you do not make me your confidant; but I hope all will come right in the end."

"Now let us go to Dead Man's Motte and see if there is any trace of the Reds having been there, as you said that you saw them; for, with this moonlight, we can easily tell."

"Yes, sir; their trail will easily show in this light," replied Brad.

And the horses' heads were turned toward the timber, which Brad and his cousin had avoided that afternoon after the discovery that the Reds were there, apparently lying in ambush for the coming of some one.

The Dead Man's Timber bore its name from the fact that half-a-dozen men had been ambushed there by foes, and shot down, their graves being dug under the two-score trees that formed the motte.

With the bright moonlight, the scattering trees did not form a very secure hiding-place for horse-men, and Major Buckner did not fear an ambush, as he knew, after nightfall, few people cared to go there, for the superstitious among the border men said that the place was haunted.

He was desirous of seeing if there were any fresh trails in the timber, to carry out the assertion of his son that there had been Reds in hiding there.

The behavior of the boy he could not solve, and he was desirous of seeing for himself just what basis

there had been for Brad's saying that his cousin had been captured by Captain Kennard.

The two cowboys were not desirous of visiting Dead Man's Motte, and they kept their eyes well ahead, and when the timber was quite a distance off they made a discovery.

This was of a horseman riding slowly before them toward the timber.

Quickening their pace, as soon as he saw the horseman, Major Buckner saw that the stranger did likewise, holding just such a distance between them.

Urging their horses into a run, the animal ahead also began to go at the same pace, and coming down to a walk once more, the stranger did likewise until within rifle range of the timber, when he halted and faced about.

Major Buckner spoke sharply to the two cowboys, who urged that it was an apparition leading them on, and rode forward.

"Halt! Who are you, and what do you want?" came in a decisive voice.

"I am Major Buckner, of Fort Ranch, and would know who you are!"

"Have you ever heard the name of Night Hawk?" was the reply.

"Yes, often, as one of the best scouts on our frontier."

"I am Night Hawk."

"The friend of Buffalo Bill?" called out Brad Buckner.

"Yes."

"We came here to see if there was a trail of horse-men leading away from the timber, and left as late as sunset this afternoon," the major explained.

"Yes, there is such a trail—fifteen hoof-marks all told, and they led toward the northward, and the trail is not many hours old."

"I thank you, sir. Good-night!" and the major turned away, Brad by his side, and the cowboys following.

"Now, Brad, we go to the place where you say Kent Kennard overtook you and captured Belle; but is not the meeting of these sentries most mysterious?"

"It is, father, and they seem to be on the very trail that the Reds and Kennard followed."

"Yes; and how strange, my son, that such famous men as Buffalo Bill, Texas Jack and Night Hawk should be here, for they are among the famous

scouts on the border!" and, puzzling his brain to solve the mystery, Major Buckner rode on until they came in sight of the scene where Brad had parted with his cousin and her captor, and the boy said in a whisper:

"There is another silent sentinel, father!"

"By Cæsar's ghost! you are right, Brad! Is he near where you parted with Belle?"

"He seems to be on the very spot, sir; and see—he is coming toward us!"

"He is, indeed. Well, we have seen the pluckiest men this night I ever met before, for one against four does not seem in the least to disturb them.

"I shall hail him;" and raising his voice, as the party halted, Major Buckner called out:

"Ho, friend! who are you?"

"My name is White Beaver, if that is what you would know. I am a scout, now on secret service. Who are you?"

The voice was strangely musical, and yet it had the ring of commanding courage in it.

"I have heard of an army scout known as White Beaver."

"I am White Beaver; who are you?" came the demand.

"Major Dick Buckner, ranchero, and living at Fort Ranch, whither I am now going, and will be glad of your company."

"Thank you, but I must remain here."

"Do you know Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, and left him an hour ago in Prairie City."

"In no trouble, I hope?"

"None; but let me ask you if you have observed a trail where you are?"

"Yes, of two horses, a third joining them; then one leaving, and the other two branching off northeast."

"Father, what did I tell you?"

"Who was it, if not Kent Kennard?" asked the boy in a low, triumphant tone.

"God only knows; but I am bewildered, so let us go home, and to-morrow we will see what can be done for poor Belle," and they rode on, the solitary horseman still remaining where they had discovered him, and so staying as long as they could see him.

"Thank Heaven we are near home, for this night has been a bewildering one to me," and Major Buckner seemed a trifle unnerved, and fairly started as one of the cowboys said:

"Yonder is another statue-like horseman, major."

He pointed to a distant roll of the prairie, where, relieved against the moonlit sky, a horse and rider were distinctly visible.

"He is not in our trail, I am glad to see.

"Come, let us hasten home, for this night has been strangely full of mystery to me," and the party dashed on to soon disappear in the timber about the ranch.

But, glancing backward, as they rode out of sight among the trees, they saw the silent horseman still remaining at his post, apparently on duty, yet what duty they could not know.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE TRAIL.

Buffalo Bill's coming into the gambling saloon of the Overland had been a great surprise to all, for his name was known along the length of the border, and each night around the campfires and at the saloons, the deeds of the scout had been the theme of conversation.

Hardly any one there in the saloon had seen him before; but, recognized by the one who had called his name, his very name held men in check, who, with another, would have sought difficulty.

Why had he come there?

Was he on official duty?

Did he know more of Kent Kennard than others knew of him, for his business seemed to be with him?

Such were the questions asked, and a feverish excitement pervaded all when the two men, Buffalo Bill and Kent Kennard, sat down to play a game of cards.

Every other game was forgotten, conversation ceased, men drank quietly, nodding a toast to each other as they stood at the bar, and all waited for the beginning of the end that must come between those two.

The absence of Major Buckner and his son had been noticed, and commented upon; but Buffalo Bill said, quietly:

"Let them go, for there is no work for either to do here."

So the interest centered in the two men who remained to try their fortune at cards.

The table Buffalo Bill chose was against the wall and within a few feet of an open window.

He drew the table out a couple of feet, took a

chair, and, placing it to suit himself, sat down with his back to the wall and the window close upon his left hand.

Then he coolly lighted a cigar, and said in his quiet way:

"I am ready for the game, Kent Kennard. What shall it be, and for how much?"

"Name your limit," was the response.

"Well, we will begin low, for I put up one hundred on the game."

The cards were shuffled, the game was played, and Kent Kennard won.

Buffalo Bill's face showed no sign of disappointment, and a second game was played through with the same result.

"Make the dust three hundred this time," suggested Buffalo Bill, quietly.

"As you like," was the reply.

And again the ranchero won.

Without a change of expression Buffalo Bill said:

"Gentlemen, you may know my gambling pard here, but I don't, so you will excuse me if I say that I don't exactly understand his luck, though I am studying it.

"I don't accuse you of cheating, Kennard, but if I should suspect you, the moment I do, I'll shoot and ask no questions. Do you understand?"

"It is a game two can play at, Buffalo Bill," was the threatening return.

"Yes; it takes two to play a game, but only one can win, and you know my ideas about playing square, and I'm no blind man, so go ahead, and make five hundred the stakes this time."

Kent Kennard nodded, and with bated breath the crowd looked on.

For some reason Kent Kennard played more carefully than before, and it was noticed that Buffalo Bill played mechanically, for he never took his eyes off of the hands of his adversary.

When the last card was thrown down Buffalo Bill had won the game.

He smiled in a sardonic way, while Kent Kennard became very pale, though he showed no other sign of emotion.

"Shall I prescribe for you again?" sneered Buffalo Bill, and Kent Kennard nodded.

The same stakes was named, the game was played through in the same way, Buffalo Bill sharply watching the hands of the ranchero, and the scout won.

"Pard, I have a little work to do, so you must excuse me now; but another time we may meet, and then I'll give you satisfaction at cards, as well as in any other way you wish.

"Gentlemen, again join me," and Buffalo Bill arose, bowed, pocketed his winnings, called to the barman to set up drinks, and, paying for them, left the saloon.

There were those who wished to follow him, but there was that in the manner of the strange man that forbade it, and when, soon after, Captain Tayloe, the army officer, went out, expecting to find him in the Overland, he discovered that he had not been there, and searching among the other taverns, he could find no trace of him, or any one who had seen him out of the saloon.

Returning to the Overland, Captain Tayloe reached there just as he saw Kent Kennard mount his horse, held for him by one of his cowboys, who had evidently been waiting outside, and the two dashed rapidly away out of the town.

"That is not the trail to Kennard's ranch, and he is evidently following Buffalo Bill, the cowboy having posted him; but he had better let that man alone," thought Captain Tayloe, as he entered the hotel and sought his room.

In the meantime Buffalo Bill had mounted his horse, waiting under a shed near, and had hastily ridden off, as though anxious to avoid being seen.

He had taken the trail followed by the major and his party, and, reaching the open prairie, his practiced eye told him that others had traversed it since he had gone that way into the town.

Soon he came in sight of the statue-like horseman upon the trail. Then he raised his hands above his head. The other did likewise.

"Well, Jack, what news?" he called out as he drew near.

"I have had visitors, Bill," and Texas Jack told of the coming of the Buckner party.

"Well, call Broncho, and we will hunt a hiding-place, as soon as we have collected the other boys."

A shrill whistle from Texas Jack caused suddenly to rise, as from out of the ground, a horse and rider, some half a hundred yards away, where they had been lying down in the long grass.

Approaching Buffalo Bill and Jack was a young man, with long hair that a woman might have been

proud of, black as night, and a face strongly stamped with manhood.

"Well, Broncho, we will be off," said Buffalo Bill, and then set off at a gallop over the plain.

Following the same trail that Major Buckner had, Night Hawk and Dandy Dick, having been hiding near, were picked up at Dead Man's Motte, and the visit of the ranchero's party was made known to Buffalo Bill.

Pursuing the trail, they reached White Beaver seated silently upon his horse, on the spot where Belle Bradford had been kidnaped, and a whistle from him brought Dashing Dan and his horse up out of the prairie grass, where they had been in hiding.

"Now for Frank and Buck," called out Buffalo Bill, and fifteen minutes after the other two, one standing sentinel on the prairie, the other lying down not far away, were come up with, and the party of nine were together again.

"Boys, we have not done a bad night's work, for we found the trails Jack told us of, discovered that horsemen had been in the vicinity of Dead Man's Motte, found out that the girl had been captured by one who overtook her and the boy, and I met in the town Kent Kennard himself, the boy and his father, and there is a mystery that we have got to solve, for though Miss Bradford was taken, and, the youngster says by the ranchero, he proved an alibi that I could not go behind.

"We must seek a hiding-place from which to work, and in the morning take the trail of the girl and her captor, and see where it will lead us.

"We'll halt a while over the rise yonder and see if we are followed."

They then rode over the rise of prairie, their horses were staked out in the lower ground, and they threw themselves down upon the ridge to wait.

Half-an-hour thus passed, when Buffalo Bill said: "Hark!"

All listened and heard the fall of hoofs, the sound growing louder and louder, which showed they were approaching.

"They are coming and in some force," said Beaver.

"We will be ready for them, pards, so form your line," was the quiet response of Buffalo Bill, who then took his position at the right end, and the others ranged alongside.

Kneeling on one knee, they unslung their rifles and brought them round, without an order, and in perfect silence.

Nearer and nearer came the horsemen, and they were now distinctly seen by the Nine, whose heads just peered over the hilltop.

"There are some twenty of them," said Beaver.

"Yes, and they wear masks, as my glass distinctly reveals," said Buffalo Bill.

Every man carried a glass, and it was raised to his

eyes, a murmur of assent following, after which the rifles were grasped, ready for work.

Nearer and nearer came the horsemen, and arriving within a few rods of the kneeling line, stern and startling rung out the command of Buffalo Bill:

"Halt! Hands up, all of you!"

When Buffalo Bill gave the order to the coming horsemen, as they rode up over the brow of the prairie rise, he was prepared for a charge down upon his line.

They outnumbered him two to one, if not more, they appeared well-mounted, and their arms glistened in the moonlight.

They were not a body of cavalry, that was certain, and in the moonlight there was visible no white faces, only the same hue rested upon all, revealing the fact that they were either Indians, in the garb of palefaces, or whites masked.

The latter was the idea the scout took of it, and they were prepared, therefore, to meet face to face, as they believed, in a hand-to-hand struggle, the famous marauders of the prairie, known as the Red Rangers.

It was, therefore, a matter of intense surprise to Buffalo Bill, as also his comrades, to see the horsemen wheel, as one man, without a word that was heard by them, and fly away like arrows from a bow.

A score in number, they took as many different trails across the prairie, urging their horses to full speed, and seemingly bent on the motto of:

"Every man for himself, and Satan take the hindmost."

At this sudden and surprising act on the part of the horsemen, the scouts glanced at Buffalo Bill.

To have emptied nine saddles they knew it was in their power to do.

But no order came to fire, and the fingers touching the triggers did not move.

Thoroughly disciplined, the scouts acted without excitement, and hence no shot was fired, for Buffalo Bill gave no order to do so.

"Well, that beats all that I ever saw; but let them go, for we will yet reach the end of their trails, and I would not make a mistake and fire on a wrong party for a great deal," said Buffalo Bill.

"We might catch one of them," said Beaver, quietly.

"Do so then, Beaver, but do not fire unless you have to.

"If any one can be caught you can do it with that horse of yours," and the words had hardly left the lips of Buffalo Bill, when White Beaver had bounded toward his horse, thrown himself into the saddle, and then paused to pick out his man.

"We shall hunt a hiding-place over in the creek bottom, Beaver, so come there," called out Buffalo Bill, and with a wave of the hand, Beaver darted

away, his superb black stallion, Mephisto, going like the very wind.

"Now, pards, it is best that we hunt cover, and the creek lies yonder, three miles away, and we must hunt it by different trails, so as to throw any one off the scent that might be curious.

"There is a water wash near a large tree that rises high above the surrounding timber, and you can see it as you get near the creek, and there will be our camp.

"Now, I will go off this way, and we'll scatter the trails as did that band of horsemen, whoever they are," and Buffalo Bill mounted and rode off, the others following his example, and each one verging away from each other as far as possible, and yet having the same objective point in view.

In the meantime Beaver had disappeared from sight over the rolling prairie, and he was riding hot on the heels of a flying horseman.

He was gaining rapidly also, his black stallion going at a speed that was wonderful, and yet not urged by spur or voice.

The intelligent animal seemed to fully understand just what was expected of him, and he meant to do it.

So lightly did he run, that his hoof-falls were drowned by the thud of the horse ridden by the fugitive, and after having gone a mile the horseman drew up and glanced about him.

His comrades had scattered so far that he could not see them, and he sat for a moment pondering, as it were, upon just what course to pursue.

Beaver's quick eye had detected the halt, and quick as a flash he drew rein, sprung to the ground, and said:

"Down, sir!"

Into the grass dropped the horse like dead, and his master lay beside him, so that when the fugitive glanced behind him he saw no pursuer.

Having decided upon his course, he turned off to the left, and rode on at a slow pace.

Then Beaver arose from the grass, his horse sprung up, and mounting, he started off at a course almost parallel with the fugitive and yet circling a little from him and out of sight.

After going at a rapid run for a mile or more, he drew rein to the left, ascended a prairie rise, and glanced over the level plain.

There, as he had expected to find, was the fugitive, not two hundred yards away.

He was coming on at a canter, directly for the spot, and he did not see the scout until within long pistol range of him.

Quickly he drew rein, and, after a moment's inspection, called out:

"Is that you, Frank?"

"It is, pard," called back Beaver, most truthfully, his real name being Frank.

At this the fugitive rode on once more at a canter, directly for the scout, who moved toward him.

"Coyotes of Kansas! but what a surprise we had, Black Frank."

"Who were they?" called out the pursued, as he drew near.

"Buffalo Bill's scouts, pard," was the quick response of Beaver, as he cast his lariat over the head of the man's horse, and at the same time leveled his repeating rifle full at the breast of the rider.

The startled horse bounded away, but was brought up sharp by the lariat, and the surprised and alarmed rider, caught wholly at a disadvantage, obeyed with alacrity the stern command:

"Hands up, or die!"

Leaving his horse still at a stand, holding the animal of his foe, Beaver sprung to the ground, and rapidly approaching his captive, still covering him with his rifle.

"Well, sir, you are my game, and I'll trouble you for your toys," and Beaver hastily disarmed the man, after which he took the lariat from about the neck of the horse, and threw the noose about the body of the rider, binding his arms by his side.

Mounting then, he started across the prairie, his captive riding in silence by his side.

Not a word was spoken by one or the other, on the ride to the rendezvous, and just as he reached the timber on the creek banks, Texas Jack called out:

"Ho, pard, I was waiting for you, for the boys are all at the retreat, and a nice one it is, too," and he joined Beaver and his prisoner, adding:

"You got your man, I see?"

"Oh, yes, Jack, and nobody hurt; but this is a snug place for a retreat, is it not?" and he glanced at the ravine, heavily fringed with thickets, into which they rode.

Up the water-wash, or ravine, the scouts were visible, cooking breakfast, for dawn was just beginning to pale the moonlight, and their horses were staked out near, enjoying a feast of rich grass.

All glanced up as the two scouts rode up with the prisoner, and Buffalo Bill called out:

"Bravo, Beaver! you got your bird, and, as I live, it's a Red Ranger!"

CHAPTER V.

THE RED.

The man who was brought into the camp by Beaver was an odd-looking being, at a cursory glance.

He was well mounted upon a jet-black horse, equipped with a Mexican saddle and bridle, and he was dressed in buckskin, even to mocassins.

At the back of his saddle he carried a roll of necessary baggage, a couple of *serapes*, an oilskin blanket,

leggings, and a raincap, or helmet of the same material.

A pair of boots and a slouch hat, with a haversack of provisions, hung at one side of the saddle, and a lariat, pistol-holster, and a small hatchet were upon the other, showing that the individual was well fixed for camping, fighting or disguising himself.

He was a large man, broad-shouldered, and carried a knife and revolvers in his belt.

But strangest of all was that his head and face were wholly concealed from view, and by a covering, or mask.

It was a covering of red.

This headdress fell to the shoulders, and gave to the man a most startling appearance, and which had called forth the remark of Buffalo Bill to Beaver, that he had caught a Red.

"Now, sir, you can dismount," said Beaver, as he halted with his prisoner, and Dashing Dan led their horses away, the Red having quietly obeyed.

"Who are you, pard?" asked Buffalo Bill, as he led the man to the campfire.

But the prisoner made no reply.

"Are you deaf, pard?" asked Buffalo Bill.

Still no reply.

"Are you dumb also?"

Yet no response.

"He can talk, and he is not deaf."

"What did you find out from him?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"I asked him no questions, but simply brought him in," was the reply.

"He mistook me for one of his pards, who, I now recall, all rode black horses, or dark ones, for he called out:

"Is that you, Frank?"

"Of course it was, and I rode nearer, and he obeyed my order to hands up, so I know he is neither deaf or dumb."

"Well, a bird that can sing and won't sing, must be made to sing, so just take off his headgear, Dandy Dick."

The scout stepped forward, carefully raised the mask, or helmet, and the face was revealed was certainly a disagreeable one.

Red-headed, the hair cut short, with a cropped sandy beard, bloated face, and small, evil, gray eyes, he looked like one who would be guilty of any crime, and possessed no conscience to reproach him for it.

But the man only stared at his captors in a dogged kind of way.

"Now, my man, you must answer the questions I put to you," said Buffalo Bill.

"In the first place," he continued, "are you not one of the band known as the Reds?"

The man appeared not to have heard the question.

"You refuse to answer, do you?"

Silence alone gave assent.

"Now, pard, you have been taken with your colors on, and, therefore, we know you to be one of the Reds, but as you are our first capture, and we wish to make a quick ending of our work in this part of the country, I am willing to make terms with you."

Still the silence and the dogged stare.

"Now, if I offer you your life will you answer my questions truthfully?"

No response.

"You seem determined not to reply, and you may fear that we will put you to death; but let me tell you that you are mistaken, for I bear an official order from the general commanding this district, to put all of the Reds to death, as I may capture them, for you have all been guilty of the basest of crimes, and not one of you is there but deserves hanging."

"But I make an exception of you, to save time, and accomplish my ends, and offer you your life and your pardon, if you will tell me what I would know and aid us to capture your evil comrades.

"Now, what do you say?"

The man appeared like one who did not think he was the one addressed, and no response came from his sternly-set, thick lips.

"Don't think that you have fallen into the hands of missionaries, who will try to redeem you from your wicked ways, for you have not, as you may know when I tell you that we have seen blood flow, and are not afraid of death.

"That gentleman, who so cleverly took you in is White Beaver, while this pleasant-faced youth is Texas Jack, and that tall man you may recall when I tell you his name is Fighting Frank.

"Then we have Night Hawk, Broncho, Dashing Dan, Dandy Dick, Buck, and last, I am known as Buffalo Bill.

"Now that you know, you may perhaps be pleased to respond by introducing yourself."

The man's face had twitched nervously at the mention of the names; but he still preserved that stolid silence.

"You refuse to accept my offer, and talk?"

No reply.

"Beaver!"

"Well, Bill?"

"You captured this man, so what shall we do with him?"

"He is in your hands, Buffalo Bill?"

"You are sure he can talk?"

"Yes, for he hailed me."

"Then I will lose no time with him, as he is so stubborn, but carry out the general's orders.

"Buck!"

"Yes, chief."

"Take Dandy Dick and Dashing Dan to aid you, place this fellow fifteen paces in your front, fire at the word, and kill him.

"What say you, pards, to the sentence?" and Buffalo Bill glanced over the faces of his comrades.

"It is just, for the Reds deserve no mercy," responded Frank, and the others nodded their approval.

"Once more, my man, will you accept your life on the terms offered?"

The captive did not show a sign that he heard the question, and Buffalo Bill said, impatiently:

"Buck, you have your orders, so carry them out."

Buck stepped forward and led the captive away a few paces, placed him in position, took his stand in front of him, with Dandy Dick and Dashing Dan, and Buffalo Bill called out:

"Speak, quick, Red, for we are in deadly earnest!"

Not a word came in response, and then followed the command:

"Fire!"

The three revolvers flashed together, and the man's lips were forever stilled by instant death.

Having been so constantly on the go of late, both men and horses needed a rest, and Buffalo Bill determined to remain in camp until late in the afternoon, when they could go to the spot where Belle Bradford had been captured, and take up the trail there, and see where it led to.

With such a clear night of moonlight as it promised to be, he did not have any fear of not being able to follow the trail, once they had struck it, and he knew that all needed rest.

The dead outlaw had been buried, breakfast had been cooked, and was partaken of with a relish, and Texas Jack and Broncho agreed to stay on the watch while the others slept, and both took up their positions at a point of observation that commanded the approach to the camp, and from such a distance that they felt, sleeping as they did, lightly as watchdogs, they, too, could rest.

"I think I shall turn Red Ranger for a while, Beaver," said Buffalo Bill.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, there is that fellow's suit, rig-out and horse, and I might as well start out to see what I can discover in it."

"You know best, chief, and it is not a bad idea, but go slow, pard."

"I will; now how do I look?" and Buffalo Bill drew on the red head-mask.

"The Reds would never know you," laughed Beaver, as he threw himself down to rest upon his blanket.

Putting on the buckskin suit of the dead man, and mounting his horse as well, Buffalo Bill rode out of the camp.

Leaving the timber of the creek, which here made a bend almost in the opposite direction, Buffalo Bill struck out over the prairie, following his own trail of the night before.

Straight to the spot where he discerned the trails that met, and the one that branched off toward the westward in the direction of the ranch of Kent Kennard, he went.

"I'll see just where this trail goes," and he cast his eyes about him, when he discerned a horseman coming slowly over the prairie, his head bent down, as though he was following a trail.

To dismount and lead his horse away to a water-wash, some hundred yards away, was the work of a few moments.

But the gully was not deep enough to hide the scout and his horse, and the persuasions of the former were not sufficient to force the latter to lie down.

"Down you must go, horse," said Buffalo Bill, and quickly he threw the lariat about the animal's legs, and threw him flat on his side.

Then he lay down upon him, and was just hidden from view of any one riding near.

"It struck me that I caught a glimpse of some one in the rear of the first horseman; but I had not time to take a second look, so must go slow," he muttered.

Arranging some grass which he cut off with his bowie-knife in front of him, so as to hide his head, he peered through it out upon the spot where had occurred the mysterious capture of Belle Bradford by one who had proven himself to be miles away at the time.

Soon the rider's head came in sight, and he halted upon the scene of the kidnaping.

"It is that boy I saw last night, and who so pluckily accused the ranchero of being the captor of his cousin.

"Well, he's a plucky one, and he seems to be alone and trying to follow the trail himself; but I shall wait and see."

So saying, Buffalo Bill waited for a while, and then said:

"There he goes! off on the trail of the maiden and her capturer, whoever he was.

"I will follow him as soon as I am sure that he is not followed, for I cannot get it out of my head that I caught sight of some one else."

He waited patiently for quite a while, and was about to get up from his hiding-place, thinking that what he had seen must have been a buffalo, when suddenly, a horseman rode into view.

He was dressed in buckskin, wore a slouch hat, rode a black horse, and was well armed, while his face was by no means a prepossessing one.

"That fellow is trailing the boy, certain, so I'll call a halt on him," and Buffalo Bill stepped up from his hiding-place, his revolver ready in hand, and advanced rapidly toward the stranger.

He was not seen until within good range, as the man was attentively regarding the numerous trails that branched off from that point.

His horse starting suddenly, revealed the scout, and the man drew his revolver quickly, unheeding the ringing command:

"Hands up, pard!"

But he now saw that the one advancing upon him wore the red mask, and he lowered his weapon, and called out:

"Who are you, pard, that you don't know your Red comrade, Brandy Ben?"

"Ho, Ben, is that you? Why didn't you speak sooner, for the sun in my eyes blinded me," and Bill walked straight up to the horseman, apparently trying to uncock his revolver, as an excuse for keeping it in hand.

"Wal, I don't git onter who yer is, pard, though yer colors is all right.

"Who is yer?" and the horseman looked suspiciously at the scout as he rapidly approached.

"Black Frank," answered Buffalo Bill, remembering the name the Red had called out the night before.

The result was unexpected, for he dropped his hand like lightning on his revolver, while he called out:

"Black Frank hain't got white hands!"

With his words he fired, and the bullet struck the scout's pistol, knocking it out of his hand before he could fire, while the shock caused his arm to fall by his side, temporarily benumbed.

But instantly his left hand fell upon the revolver upon his hip, and yet before he could use it his adversary fired a second time, the bullet cutting this time close.

Ere he could fire again, Buffalo Bill drew trigger, and the man fell forward on the horn of his saddle, while his horse started to run.

But, quick as a flash, the scout seized the bridle-rein and the rider dropped to the ground, a bullet in the center of his forehead.

"That was a close call for me," coolly said Bill, throwing off the mask, and bending over the slain man.

"Ah! here is a badge of service in the Red Rangers' band."

And he drew out of a saddle pouch a red head-dress like the one he had worn.

"This is number two of the Rangers.

Let me see, I cannot play Black Frank, from what he said, with white hands, so I will have to blacken them, or play Brandy Ben, the spirited name this gentleman hailed under.

"Let me see! I will bury him yonder in the water-wash, and then hasten on after the boy.

"I am sorry I had to kill him, for he might not have withstood the temptation offered his comrade, and kept silent."

So saying, he carried the body to the gully, released the bound horse, and soon had the man buried

with the aid of the hatchet which he, too, carried at his saddle horn, as the other outlaw had done.

Resuming his mask, he then mounted one horse, and leading the other, rode at a gallop after the boy, who was now evidently a long distance ahead of him.

"Well, if we go on at this rate, the Reds preferring death to talking, and having to kill others to keep from being killed, and thus losing the chance of a dying confession through wounding them, we are in a fair way to wipe out the band and yet not find the girl if she is really their captive."

Thus thinking half-aloud, Buffalo Bill rode on at a lope, the led horse following readily, until suddenly and seemingly from out of the earth, came the startling words:

"Hands up! or I kill you!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOY TRAILER.

When young Brad Buckner returned home, with his father, their story was told to Mrs. Bradford, who was in deep distress at the loss of her daughter.

"It is some trick of that vile man, Richard, for he alone is guilty," said she to her brother, after the major had told her how Kent Kennard had proven an alibi.

"But that army officer's word could not be doubted, sister."

"I would doubt every one but Brad.

"He was with Belle, and he well knew Kent Kennard, and he is not mistaken, let that man prove as he will that he was not there.

"I know him but too well, and that he swore that Belle should never marry any one but him.

"During the war he was nothing more than a guerrilla, serving on both sides, as it pleased him, and there is nothing that he will not do, and I believe that he has intercepted the letters from Captain Reynolds, who you know in his last, brought by an army courier, said he had written often, and had received no reply.

"He said he had told Belle he would appear suddenly, and make her his wife, as it was hard for him to get away.

"Now, I am convinced that Kent Kennard got those letters, in some way, and so determined to kidnap Belle, fearing she would in the end not marry him."

"But the power he holds in his secret over us, sister, should have convinced him that Belle dared not do otherwise," urged the major.

"But he is aware that Belle does not know this secret, and might disregard its value."

"That might be."

"I tell you, Richard, Kent Kennard has captured Belle, and no one else, and she is now hidden at his

ranch, or somewhere, and I think you should take your cowboys and go there and demand that he give her up."

"And have him make known the secret, sister?" said the major, in a low tone.

"Alas! I forgot his power over us.

"No, we must wait and suffer."

This much did Brad Buckner hear, as he lay in his little room near where the major and Mrs. Bradford were talking, and he made up his mind that he would go the next day to the ranch of Kent Kennard and demand that he give up his dearly-loved cousin.

"He won't dare kill me, a boy, and yet I can kill him," was the thought in his mind as he dropped off to sleep, leaving his father and aunt still talking together in the sitting-room.

After breakfast the next morning, he looked to his weapons most carefully, mounted his best mustang, and saying that he was going off on a hunt, rode away from the ranch, leaving his father and aunt still asleep, for they had not retired until dawn.

Straight to the spot where the kidnaping had occurred he rode, and after examining well the different trails, decided upon which was the one he wished to follow.

"That track is made by Rocket's hoof, I know, and nobody can fool me on that," he muttered, referring to the horse ridden by his cousin.

He little dreamed that the eyes of Buffalo Bill were then upon him, or that his trail had been crossed some distance back, and followed by the man calling himself Brandy Ben.

"Come, Firecracker, we must be in a hurry, for we are on Rocket's trail, and I think we can follow it to the end," he said, addressing his spirited little mustang, that started off at a swinging walk, seemingly following the trail of his equine comrade by instinct.

The boy had gone but half a mile when he heard the crack of a revolver, followed by a second and third report in quick succession.

The prairie was very undulating where he was, and he could not see very far around him, but his eyes fell upon a buffalo wallow not far away, and toward this he rode, the trail going close to the side of it.

Arriving there, he beheld the horns of a buffalo and around it the grass had grown to a considerable height, so that the boy saw a safe hiding-place, or at least a place of defense should he be pursued by an enemy.

To ride into the wallow and make the pony lie down was but short work, and then he went on foot to the highest rise near him, and looked around the prairie.

No one was in sight, and no more pistol shots had been heard.

He knew that Indians or Reds were likely to be about, and he was aware that his life was in danger;

but he was a fearless young fellow, and nerved himself to meet the worst.

After waiting a considerable time, he concluded to go back to his pony, and resume his trailing, when, boylike, he leaped up into the air to get a better look before going.

As he did so, his eyes fell upon the head and shoulders of a horseman coming over the prairie.

Again he sprung several feet into the air, and distinctly saw the coming horseman.

"He's following my trail, too," he said, as he ran back to the buffalo wallow.

He had not very long to wait ere the rider came in sight.

"It is a Red!" cried Brad, as he saw the red mask.

"And he is leading a horse," he added, as he got his rifle ready to fire.

Nearer and nearer came the horseman.

Until suddenly from out the buffalo wallow, shrill and clear, came the words that end the foregoing chapter.

In an instant Buffalo Bill recognized the boyish voice, and he threw his hands above his head, while he said, in a pleasant way:

"My hands are up, my boy; but I'm not a Red, as you suppose, only masquerading as one.

"Come out and let us get better acquainted, for you caught me fairly off my guard."

"Who are you?" cautiously asked the boy, still keeping his position, and his rifle at a level.

"I am one whom you met last night, when with your father."

Brad was cautious, and extremely so for a boy.

"What was that firing back on the prairie awhile ago?"

"I shot a Red, who would not surrender, and this is his horse."

"Let me see your face, please!" and the request was more of a demand, for Brad still kept his rifle leveled.

"Certainly, my boy," and Buffalo Bill took off the red mask, and glanced at the youngster with a smile.

"I know you now, for my father and I spoke of your handsome face and of your soft-toned voice after we left you," and Buffalo Bill smiled at the innocent compliment of the boy, while he said:

"Well, my boy, I am glad to have met you, and I must tell you I was on your trail, for you passed near me an hour ago, and I would have hailed you then, only I had caught sight of the Red on your track, and wished to ambush him.

"Now, let us have a talk together, and you must tell me all you know about this capturing of your cousin, and then I may take you into confidence, and together we must save the young lady and hang her kidnaper."

"Oh, sir, if you only would!"

"What, hang the kidnaper?"

"Yes, sir, and save Cousin Belle, too, for I know she is wretched, and I don't wonder, for she has such a splendid sweetheart in Texas, who is captain of the Rangers there, and it will break his heart if she is forced to marry that rascal Kent Kennard."

"Well, she shall not, if I can help it."

"Now, to follow the trail left by your cousin and her captor, whoever he may be," and in a few moments more the two set off on the trail across the prairie left by the horses of Belle Bradford and the man who held her captive.

Buffalo Bill knew that the boy was well acquainted with the ranch of the daring lover of his cousin, and could give him much information that would be valuable to the party in carrying out their plans.

As he rode along with Brad Buckner, he gleaned from the talkative boy all the information he could regarding the country, the settlers, the town of Prairie City, and about Kent Kennard.

"That is the home of Kent Kennard, sir," said Brad.

"Yes, and the trails seem to lead just there."

"Yes, sir, for Kent Kennard, and no one else, kidnapped my Cousin Belle," firmly responded the boy.

Buffalo Bill gazed with some interest upon the ranch they were approaching.

It was located upon the banks of a stream, lightly fringed with timber, and upon a rise that approached almost the prominence of a hill.

There were hundreds of cattle seen about on the prairie, with a cowboy here and there watching them, and a broad trail led to the stream, where there was a watering-place and ford.

There was a large cabin, with six rooms, facing the stream, and it was strongly built and comfortable.

"He has a snug home there, and as strong as a fort," said Buffalo Bill, who was watching the place, as he approached it, through his field glass.

He had taken off his mask, and resumed his slouch hat, so that he had the appearance of a plainsman.

"Will you go on to the ranch, sir?" asked Brad.

"Yes, near enough to see if this trail goes directly to the gate, for I know the track now of the horse ridden by your cousin, and can tell it anywhere."

"Suppose Kent Kennard is there?"

"Well, I will simply tell him I am following Miss Bradford's trail, to his house, and ask if she is there."

"He will say no."

"Then it will remain to see if he can prove it, for I shall return to camp and make my discovery known."

Brad seemed pleased, for there was something about this pleasant-spoken, handsome man that gave him confidence.

So on to the ranch they went, passing near two cowboys who eyed them significantly, but said nothing.

The trail led straight to the gate and then disappeared, and Brad said, exultantly:

"I told you so, sir!"

"Yes, this looks bad."

"Hello, within there!" called out Buffalo Bill.

"What's wanted?" said a gruff voice from the other side of the stockade, and his voice came through a small hole in the wood, from which he had evidently seen the approach of the scout and the boy.

"Is Captain Kennard in?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"In Prairie City."

"Has he any visitors at the ranch?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sartin."

"Is there not a lady here?"

"No."

"A lady was out riding last night, got lost, and the trail of her horse leads here."

"She hain't here."

"Have you seen a lady come here?"

"No."

"Will you let us come in and await the return of your master?"

"I hain't got no master."

"Well, of Kent Kennard?"

"Nobody's allowed in when he's away."

"That's strange border hospitality."

"It's safest."

"Well, we'll have to call again."

"I don't care."

"When do you expect him home?"

"Don't know."

"Come, Brad," and Buffalo Bill turned away from the gate, the boy by his side.

Riding up to the two cowboys, who were smoking their pipes under a tree, the scout said:

"Good-morning, gentlemen."

They nodded without reply.

"Can you tell me when Captain Kennard will be at home?"

"No."

"The gateman says he is away."

No reply.

"Have you seen a lady on horseback crossing the prairie since yesterday?"

"No."

"Have you seen any Reds about here?"

"No."

"Do you know Buffalo Bill?"

They started, and eyed the scout cautiously, while one said:

"We has heerd o' him."

"He has not been seen about here to-day?"

"No."

"Gentlemen, I bid you good-day."

"Who is you?" called out one of the cowboys.

"You never heard of Buffalo Bill?"

"We has, and he's a dandy to kill."
 "I am he," and Buffalo Bill rode on, while one of the cowboys gave a long whistle of surprise.

"Well, Brad, we found out where the trail led, and the manner in which Kent Kennard's men treat us convinces me that there is something wrong in his ranch.

"Now, come with me to my camp; but you will have to keep the secret."

"I will, sir," said Brad, delighted at feeling himself growing into such importance as to have a secret with, and be a companion of, noted scouts of the plains.

"And Brad, my plan is to take my scouts to-night and capture Kennard's ranch and hold it, and I believe we can force some one of those we capture here to lead us to the retreat of the Reds, while we may find your cousin in the house."

"And you do all this for Cousin Belle?"

"Yes, and would do more, for when I was a Union soldier I was captured in the Confederate lines, and would have been hanged as a spy but for your cousin.

"She was a girl then of fourteen, and as I had stopped at the house before, and one night defended them from some geurrillas, she aided me to escape, and I told her if ever I could aid her to command me.

"Ten days ago, by Cowboy Jack, she wrote to me at the fort, and told me she was in trouble, so that is why I am here with my scouts.

"Now we will soon be in camp, and it will not be long before we have Kent Kennard's ranch."

One hour after the arrival of Buffalo Bill and his boy pard in camp, the scouts were on the march for the Kennard Ranch, and before dawn it was surrounded and captured.

But Belle Bradford was not there.

Yet, as Buffalo Bill had hoped, he soon forced one of the cowboys to turn traitor, and made him guide over the trail taken for the retreat of the Reds, Brad being allowed to go along also.

CHAPTER VII.

BUFFALO BILL'S PLEDGE KEPT.

The retreat of the Reds was a strong camp pleasantly located.

There were some thirty men, half-a-dozen women, many children and a few negroes belonging to the band, and they had a camp commander and a chief over all, who was the planner of their work in the field and seldom visited the retreat.

In a large cabin, situated upon the slope of the hill, and commanding a view of the camp, valley and river, with the hill beyond, sat a maiden, idly gazing out upon the scene before her, when suddenly a horse dashed up to the door, and the rider sprung to the ground.

The rider was a woman, one with a sun-browned, handsome face, scarcely more than twenty-five and with the look of one who had known what it was to suffer.

Her form was very graceful in her riding habit; and her slouch hat, encircled with a gold cord, gave her a jaunty air.

"I have news for you," she said, addressing the one in the cabin.

Rising, she came out upon the piazza and asked coldly:

"Well, what is the news you bear?"

"Captain Kennard will soon be here."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, for his men, some of them, have just come in, and they report that he is on his way.

"He will soon be here, he having gone to an Indian camp, where is a missionary priest, to have him come here with him, that he may make you his wife."

"God forbid!"

"It is useless for you to go against your fate, girl.

"I tried the same, and see me now, the inmate of an outlaw camp.

"I loved a man, he made me his wife, a rival told him ill of me, and he deserted me without a word.

"I came West in search of him, was shot down on the prairie, when I was looking for him, by a cut-throat who sought my gold.

"A wagon train came along, and the assassin fled, and I was buried by the settlers, who went on their way.

"The assassin came back, dragged me out of the grave to see if my rings yet remained, and found me alive.

"The bullet had grazed my temple and stunned me only; but I would have died but for his return.

"Just then, as he staggered back in horror a horseman dashed up, fired and the assassin fell dead and was thrown into my grave by my preserver.

"Half unconscious I was carried to a ranch, tenderly nursed, and came to find, as I believed, my husband was by my side.

"To him I poured forth my story, how I had done no wrong, that it was the work of a rival to part us, and how I had followed him, to be ever near him.

"Then he said:

"'What if your husband were an outlaw?'"

"'I would still cling to him,' I answered.

"'Through all?'"

"'Yes, through everything.'"

"'I am not your husband,' he said, 'but his twin brother, Kent Kennard; but your husband, Kendall Kennard, lives, is well, and is my associate in an outlaw band.'"

"'I remain here at my ranch, to give him points to work on, and he roams the prairie with his men, and commands our retreat in the Indian Territory.'"

"And you?" asked the maiden, gazing full into the face of the strange woman.

"I came to my husband here, and have been with him ever since."

"And the man that kidnaped me and brought me here?"

"Was my husband, serving as his brother, at his request."

"And Kent Kennard?"

"Left Prairie City to go to the Indian camp and get the priest I spoke of, and bring him here."

"How strangely alike they are."

"Startlingly so in appearance."

"In wickedness too," was the reply of Belle Bradford.

"You will learn to love him and forget his misdeeds."

"Never the one or the other, and I cannot believe that I will be forced into this marriage, and I appeal to you, as a woman, to save me."

"I can do nothing, for Kent is chief, my husband is lieutenant."

"I went to his ranch a few nights ago, to ask him to spare you, but I found Kent was not there, so left by the secret way and returned here."

"Kent is determined to marry you, my husband just told me, for he has seen him since your capture, and there is no hope for escape."

"Heaven have mercy! there he comes now!"

"Which is it, Kent or Kendall Kennard?" asked the woman.

"Kent Kennard."

"You are mistaken; it is my husband."

As she spoke a horseman rode up and dismounted.

Certainly it did look like Captain Kent Kennard; but just then, coming up the valley, accompanied by a priest, was Kent Kennard himself, and poor Belle groaned in an agony of spirit, while the woman said:

"I am sorry, but there is no hope for you, Miss Bradford, for I know the will of the man who intends to make you his wife."

When Kendall Kennard reached the piazza he greeted his wife affectionately and bowed to Belle Bradford, while he said:

"I hope your stay has not been unpleasant, Miss Bradford."

"How could it be otherwise, sir, when I am forced to associate with outlaws?"

"You are severe; but here comes my brother, and you must visit upon him, not me, your reproach, for I but carried out his commands."

In a little while Kent Kennard approached, accompanied by the priest, a good-faced, deaf old man, who was devoting his life to converting redskins, and succeeding poorly.

Kent Kennard bowed low to Belle, kissed his sister-in-law, introduced the priest to the ladies and

then led him to his room, himself retiring to the piazza.

"I had to wait for the old fellow a couple of days, as he was off on some religious trail in the hills," he said, with a laugh.

And turning to Belle, he said:

"I did not expect, Miss Bradford, that I would have to have you kidnaped to make you my wife, but it was so."

"And you intend to force me into this alliance with you?"

"Oh, yes, for I have much to say to you."

"As soon as I have made Miss Bradford my wife, I shall take the trail of Buffalo Bill, and run him to earth, for he must be gotten rid of, or he'll be down on us here before we can get rid of our plunder and horses."

"And then, brother?"

"Why we must give up outlawry, and turn to mining, you know."

"Now, Miss Bradford, let me say to you what I wish, and before my brother and his wife," and he turned to Belle, with the cynical smile on his face that seemed to play there always when he was deeply moved.

"As you please, sir," was the cool reply.

"In the first place, I wish to say that you are aware that I hold a secret of your family?"

"I am."

"Do you know what it is?"

"Not exactly, I am free to confess."

"Well, Miss Bradford, unless you promise to become my wife this night, without making a fuss about it, so as to win that priest to your side, for he thinks this is a settlers' camp, I will have your father hanged!"

"My father! Why, he is dead!" gasped poor Belle.

"You are mistaken; he was reported dead, but he is alive."

"Oh, God!"

"It is true, and he is now dwelling in Colorado, nothing more than a prisoner, though he is free to go as he pleases there."

"Your father, Miss Bradford, was an officer in the Confederate army, and he entered the Union lines as a spy."

"He was taken as a spy, had papers upon him which condemned him, was tried and sentenced to be hanged."

"He made his escape, was fired upon when crossing the river, and was seen to sink."

"But he did not sink, was not hurt, and escaped."

"He dared not return home when the war was ended, and so he came West, to Colorado, becoming a miner."

"Your mother knows he is not dead, your uncle knows it, and they are aware that I aided him to escape and sent him West."

"They know that I am aware of where he is, and that I have but to give his name and whereabouts, at an army post, to have a squad of soldiers sent for him, and the sentence of death by hanging carried out upon him.

"Now, this is the secret I hold, Miss Bradford, so I ask you, will you be my wife, or shall I give your father to the gallows?"

"I will marry you," came in a voice that quivered with anguish.

"You pledge yourself to that?"

"I do."

"Another thing, Miss Bradford."

"Well, sir?"

"Your father has struck it rich; in other words, he has found a mine of gold that will make him a millionaire, and you are his heiress.

"When you are my wife, we will go to him, and when you have made him give to me one-half interest in his mine, I will release you from your galling bonds, for I wish no woman for a wife who hates me."

"Gladly will I do this," cried Belle Bradford, the tears of joy coming into her beautiful eyes.

But where is my father?" she asked.

"At a mining camp in Colorado known as the Cathedral, and he goes under the name Buck Bradley.

"Now, Lucille, give us a supper, a wedding feast, as it were."

The woman arose and left the piazza, and Belle quickly followed her, her heart throbbing with emotion.

As they departed, Kent Kennard said:

"There come a pack of our Reds, Ken!"

"Yes, they are the boys," and their eyes were turned upon a party of horsemen, eleven in number, who were riding leisurely up the valley toward the camp, and still wearing their red masks.

"They are coming right up to report to us, Ken," said Kent Kennard, alluding to the eleven horsemen who were now near the headquarters cabin and coming directly toward it.

"Great God! what does that mean?" cried Kendall Kennard, as shouts and shots were heard down the valley, and a dozen horsemen were seen charging into the outlaw camp.

Instantly all but four of the horsemen near the cabin wheeled and dashed back toward the camp.

But those four came on, and dashing up before the piazza, threw themselves from their horses, while they quickly dragged from their heads the red masks they wore.

A wild cry broke from the lips of the twin brothers, and they dropped their hands upon their weapons, for they recognized Buffalo Bill.

"You are my prisoner, Kent Kennard!" shouted Buffalo Bill, springing toward the chief.

"And you are mine, sir!" said Texas Jack, as he faced the twin brother.

But the brothers answered by firing, and both the Texan and Bill were wounded, though lightly, while their shots brought the outlaws down, the chief wounded fatally, the other dropping dead, as out of the house dashed Belle Bradford and the outlaw's wife.

With a wild shriek, the outlaw's wife threw herself upon the body of her husband, while the maiden sprung forward and was grasped in the arms of her lover, the Texan Ranger.

"Curse you both, take my dying blessing!" shouted Kent Kennard, as he lay prostrate on the piazza, and he drew from his bosom a revolver and leveled it.

But ere he could draw trigger there came a shot, and a bullet shattered his arm.

It was fired by Buffalo Bill, who had mounted his horse, and their comrades, leaving Brad and the Texan to hold the cabin, knowing they could well do it against ordinary odds.

In a moment more the fight had ended, the outlaw camp was taken, and a score of Reds had been either taken, killed, or wounded.

But the attacking party had also suffered, as Buck had fallen, and half-a-dozen others had been wounded, among them being Brad, who had covered himself with glory.

Away from the dead body of her husband the poor outlaw's wife was drawn by Belle Bradford's gentle hand, and words of sympathy were offered her.

But she refused to be comforted, and went off alone to mourn her dead.

Kent Kennard died a few moments after the shot from Buffalo Bill that broke his arm and saved the life of Belle Bradford, perhaps of her lover too, and the brothers were borne away and buried in the same grave.

Belle and Brad and the scouts for an escort started off the next day for Buckner Ranch.

They were also accompanied by Lucille, the bandit's wife, who said that she would return to the East, and Brad escorted her into Prairie City, where she took the overland stage going eastward, and nothing was heard of her afterward.

Thus it was that Buffalo Bill kept his pledge to the Red Rangers.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 43, will contain "Buffalo Bill in Zigzag Cañon; or, Fighting Red Hugh's Band." Red Hugh was one of the most desperate outlaws ever recorded in border history. The story of Buffalo Bill's pursuit of him in the famous Zigzag Cañon is one that you cannot afford to miss.



THRILLING ADVENTURE



Of course you know all about this contest, boys, and the corking prizes we offer. If you don't, turn to page 30, read the announcement, and get to work on an anecdote before you are a minute older. The contest has opened well. Keep up the good work. Remember, everyone has a chance of winning. The boy who writes the best story will get the prize. In many cases, however, it is hard to judge between two stories equally good. In a case like that the prize goes to the boy whose contribution is the neatest and most legibly written. Remember that. Get your stories in early. Here are a few good ones.

My First Experience with an Otter.

(By J. B. Cracker, Me.)

On the 14th day of December, 1901, I left camp with my partner for a day's hunt, and as we were going down Jomary Lake, fifteen miles from Norcross, and about two miles from camp, I saw something coming toward us. As I did not know what it was, I called my partner's attention to it. He told me it was an otter.

I was very anxious to get it; I loaded my rifle and waited his coming.

I waited until he was within twenty feet of me and fired. Well, I missed him, and this made him furious, and he came at me with all the fury of a wild animal at bay. I dropped my gun and went at him with my ax. Alas! I slipped on the ice and fell.

The courageous beast was upon me, and commenced scratching me. My partner, thinking it a harmless beast, stood back and looked on. But time showed him that it was a beast that it didn't do to play with, so he leveled his 303-Savage and fired.

The bullet took effect, for the beast rolled off from me and I jumped to my feet. I was greatly relieved and almost exhausted. The otter was a large one, measuring seven feet and one inch. He weighed forty-two pounds and a half. I shouldered the animal and struck for camp.

with the butt of my revolver, while his finger again pulled the trigger and the bullet sped into the air. I disarmed him at the same time keeping him covered with my gun, pulled the cartridges out of his cylinder, got him by the collar and pulled him to his feet, handed back his gun and started to ask him questions, but he refused to answer. All he said was:

"If you shoot my dog I will pump you full of lead. I'll get revenge on you sometime."

I told him he would have to do better than he had done this time. He grumbled and walked away.

We went on our way again, the path leading through thick woods about one mile long. As we were about half-way through, we heard the crackling of a stick and the rattling of brush. I at once pulled my friend aside, behind a large tree and told him to keep still and listen. Suddenly three dark forms glided out of the woods into the path just before us. They came up to the tree, behind which we were concealed and started to talk. I at once recognized one of them as the ruffian I had met a little while before. He had joined two of his companions, and I heard them plainly say that if they could catch me they would make a sieve out of me.

We kept very quiet, and after a few more words they left. We waited until they were well out of our way, and continued our journey.

The fellow has not come for his revenge since.

A Dangerous Journey.

(By C. Y. Haring, Pa.)

One winter evening I and my friend Herbert were on our way to a party. The distance was about four miles, so we decided to take a short cut across the fields. We had gone about one mile when my friend gave a cry and said:

"Look, here comes a mad dog—shoot him!"

I quickly drew my revolver, took speedy aim at his hind legs, and fired. The dog gave a cry of pain and dragged himself away. Suddenly, "crack!" went the sharp report of a pistol from behind a pile of rails, and the bullet whistled past my head.

My companion let himself fall and told me to do the same, but a thought of the brave Buffalo Bill flashed into my mind, and I leaped over the rails revolver in hand. In spite of the ruffian's trying to cover me with his gun I knocked him down

Saved by Sport.

(By H. S. Delcker, Baltimore.)

Sport is my pet Newfoundland dog, and is very pretty, and has a noble look about his eyes. We live in the country all winter, and as my story opens I was walking along the road which leads to the skating lake, with Sport at my heels.

When I reached the lake no one was there, and it was only half frozen, so I fastened my skates, and skated around. I have been going slowly for about ten minutes, and then started going fast, and as I enjoyed it, I went a little faster, and skated quite near the edge where it was not frozen. The next time I came around my skate came off, and I noticed that I was very near the edge of the ice and at once tried to stop myself, but was too late, for I slid off the ice into the water.

The water at that place was not less than fifteen feet deep, so I went down, and as I came up the first time I heard a noise as if something were struggling in the water close a

and, but went down too soon to see what it was. The second time I came up something caught me by the collar, and I was carried to shore.

When I was able to recognize objects I saw my faithful dog port, looking down in my face, and wagging his tail, and the water dripping off him. Sport saved my life, and I will not forget it very soon.

My Experience with a Snake.

(By W. W. Bolton, Ky.)

I once lived in a mountain county where snakes were not uncommon. One of the most remarkable experiences I had I will now relate. One Sunday my sisters and I were playing hide-and-go-seek. While running around the corner of the house I stepped upon a large house snake which frightened me very badly.

My screams were heard and my mother came to my assistance. She killed the snake.

But this didn't scare us enough to break up our game, for we continued it.

In the next game I hid behind a stump and came upon another snake. But this being only a garden snake I soon killed it without even telling any one until it was over.

In the next game I ran down the road to the spring and came in contact with another snake by stepping upon it. This was a blowing viper.

Knowing this was a dangerous one, I screamed as loud as I could. My screams soon brought my cousin, who was visiting us, to my assistance. He was not afraid of any kind of a snake. His way of killing snakes was to catch them by the tail and give them a jerk so that their heads would fly off.

I was soon released from my terrible position, but something very curious met my eyes, for from this snake there flew five whole frogs and one lizard. Never seeing this before, I ran to the house almost as badly frightened as I was with the snake.

My Adventure in a Cave Below Water-Line.

(By Sheldon Wilson, Buffalo, N. Y.)

One day in August, 1899, I was boarding at a country place near the seashore in California, and getting up a party of boys. I went down to the shore to hunt for clams, shells and other marine curiosities which abound in great numbers in that locality.

I had been searching at quite a distance from the rest of the boys when I came upon a small opening in the solid rock, into which I peered, but I saw nothing but darkness. I called the rest of the boys and one of them dared me to enter, and foolishly taking the dare, I crawled, or, rather, squeezed, through the opening.

When I was in, they handed me a torch and upon lighting it, I found the floor covered with very pretty shells of all colors and being so intent upon collecting them I did not notice the flight of time until one of the boys called in and said the tide was nearly to the entrance of the cave, and in another half hour would completely cover it.

Upon hearing this I immediately went to the entrance, but I found that it had very jagged edges which pointed inward, and although it was very easy to get in, it was another thing to get out. I resolved to try it, anyway, and putting my arms before me, I entered the hole and got about half way out when I stuck. I called to the boys to pull me out, but pull and tug as hard as they could, they could not budge me, so I told them to push me back in again. Once in again I ran all about, but I found nothing but blank walls on all sides. I was just beginning to give up in despair when the thought occurred to me to remove my clothing, which I very quickly did, and entering the hole I got further than before, but a sharp piece of rock caught my left hip, and squirm all I could, I could not budge, so in despair, I told the boys to pull ahead and they yanked me out but not without the loss of a large piece of flesh from my hip, the scar from which I have to this day.

Struck by a Train.

(By J. Y. Bowline, Tennessee.)

In the latter part of September, 1901, I went with a large crowd of boys to serenade a young couple living five miles above town. One evening about six o'clock we started walking to the home of the couple. After we had walked about two miles we found a handcar. Taking the car, we lifted it on the railroad track, all getting on. We soon had the car started down the grade. The grade was very steep and the car was soon going at great speed down the track.

I held in my hand a long pole, which I had secured for a brake. While passing a stock gap the end of the brake hit it knocking the pole from my grasp; being perhaps three-fourths of the distance down the grade the car was going at a terrific rate of speed, when all at once the whistle of the evening vestibule train was heard.

The boys yelled for brake, but in vain. What were we to do? No brake, no way to stop the car, and the fast vestibule coming up the same track our car was on.

I calculated the time and the distance, and at what point we would be hit by the train. I saw, to my great horror, that we would be struck by the train on a long trestle under which flowed the Holston River. Nearer and nearer rumbled the train. One by one the boys jumped off until at last I was left alone standing on the speeding car with death staring me in the face. I stood fascinated, watching the headlight of the approaching train, but was aroused by the shrill shriek of the whistle for brakes, but it was too late. The train struck the car, knocking it off on one side, and tearing the wheels from the woodwork, sending the top of the car spinning down, down, down, with me clinging to the planks with all my strength and every muscle strained awaiting for death, which I now thought inevitable.

It seemed to me as if I had been falling fully an hour when I heard a loud crash, felt a terrible jar, while with it came a queer numbness of the whole body. But as the cold water of the river rushed over me I felt a new lease of life had been granted me. I came up and still holding to the few planks left, struck out for the shore, reached it and fell fainting from the reaction of my nerves and the scare.

I can only faintly remember getting up and stumbling and staggering along until I reached home.

This little episode caused me to stay in bed three weeks.

Clinging to a Cliff.

(By F. J. Hilliard, Vermont.)

One day, in the summer of 1898 a friend of mine and I went into the woods for a walk. My friend proposed to try and find some caves in an old quarry in the woods, so I said, "All right," and we walked along looking for places where we would be likely to find them.

The cliff at this place was from seventy-five to a hundred and fifty feet in height, and at the bottom the ground was covered with loose stones.

My friend had started out on a little ledge about six inches wide and suddenly I heard him cry out:

"Help, help, I'm falling!"

I lay down flat on the ground and grasping him by the belt I tried to pull him up. Then I found that his weight was gradually dragging me over the cliff. I looked down and could see far below me the rough, jagged rocks and for a moment was tempted to let go of him and save myself, but I soon got over that feeling and resolved that if he went I would go too.

Then I saw that about six inches below my friend's feet there was a ledge where if he could get to it he could get a foothold.

Then I realized that if I slipped much farther I would go over the edge. Just then my foot struck a little ledge in the rock that I could just hold on to with my feet. I then let him down as far as I could reach and told him to feel around with

his feet until he struck the ledge of rock below him. He did so and soon found that it led to the top of the cliff. He climbed up and was safe. I shall never forget the feeling I had as I gazed over the edge of the cliff and felt myself slipping, and he will never know how near death he was.

An Adventure with Footpads.

(By Joe Howells, Cleveland.)

In the winter of 1899, I was employed as cash boy in Burrows Bros.

One evening two of my friends, Bernie Newman and Harry Jones, and myself, had been to a party on the West Side, and were returning about two o'clock, a. m. On approaching the viaduct we discovered two men in the act of holding up an old gentleman.

Bernie was the first to see the highwaymen, and grasping each of us by the arm drew us into the shadow of a doorway.

We were all very much scared and excited. "Bije," as Bernie was familiarly called, being a faithful reader of Buffalo Bill, proposed that we go to the rescue of the old man.

We at first demurred, but at last agreed to the daring plan.

"Bije" proposed that we steal upon the two until discovered and then pounce upon them. After some discussion we also agreed to this.

By this time the robbers had nearly finished searching their victim.

"Bije" said he would take the smaller of the two, leaving the other and larger to Harry and I.

We started toward them making as little noise as possible; when within about twenty feet of the trio, one of the bandits slightly turned his head, and thinking we were discovered we rushed upon them. It afterward proved he did not see us, but was only taking a precautionary look.

"Bije" grabbed his man by the legs, below the knees, throwing him face downward upon the pavement. We were not so successful with ours.

At first the robbers, taken by surprise only tried to get away, but seeing we were only boys they soon began to try to beat us off.

I received a stunning blow in the face, after which I knew nothing more, only hanging on with all my strength to the legs of the "hold-up man."

The old man who had taken no part in the melee, now picking up his cane, which he had dropped during the hold-up, and entered the fray.

They would certainly have escaped, however, from us had it not been for a most remarkable occurrence—a policeman appeared and promptly put both men under arrest.

The old gentleman's valuables and money which had been taken from him, were returned the next day. Both men received long workhouse sentences.

Sometime afterward we were all handsomely rewarded by the old gentleman.

A Story About Burglars.

(By Brian Walker, N. C.)

One night last summer I was suddenly aroused from a sound sleep by some one tapping lightly at my window. The air was hot and oppressive, and I had neglected to fasten the blinds. I lay still and soon heard the window being raised slowly.

I was afraid to turn over for fear of making a noise.

So I lay low, but at last I heard some one step lightly into the room. I closed my eyes and appeared to be sleeping.

The man stepped over to my bed, and finding me asleep he thought went through my pockets securing \$2.40 in money, a pocketknife and a watch. He then went into the next room which happened to be the library. In one corner of this room was a small iron safe in which we kept what money we had in the house.

As soon as I found that the man had left my room I slipped out of bed and went to the door. There he was in the next room down on his knees before the safe, working hard with a small lantern for a light. I slipped out the window, and ran for help.

I secured the services of two neighbors, and came quickly back. Just as we got to the door the man got the door of the safe open.

We commanded him to throw up his hands. He was startled that he fell over and before he got up again we had him bound.

We then sent for a policeman and soon had him lodged in jail.

My Ultimatum.

(By W. M. Spaulding, Iowa.)

I am only a little boy, born and reared in the Rocky Mountains.

The country there is still just as God made it. The simple quietness with its background of mighty grandeur which has been my environment for the fifteen years of my lifetime has made me an individual to whom certain forms of great industries appear as such a contrast as to almost paralyze my inexperienced faculties.

The incident I am about to relate occurred to me after my first visit to the great slaughter houses at South Omaha, Nebraska, with its great pall of black smoke; the jar and roar of countless machines; that awful odor; the medley of voices, as it were, from thousands of animals awaiting their doom in terror at their frightful surroundings; the shriller shrieks of pain, and the rivers of blood. My sightseeing was most brief—but quite sufficient.

I was alone, and my one thought was a quick, short walk out. I found this through the railroad yards. Once beyond the limit of the stock yards where the noises came to my ears dimly from the distance, I walked along with bowed head, oblivious to all but my experience.

At length I came to a high trestle bridge, but as the ties were at easy stepping distances apart I walked on, satisfied with the soothing effects the absence of noise had upon my nerves after so much of it. Suddenly, with a wild screech of the whistle, a locomotive pulling a string of loaded refrigerators rounded a curve at full speed, bearing directly down upon me.

I had passed the middle of the trestle, and along the edge spiked close to the end of the ties was a two-by-four beam. Forgetting all other danger along this narrow pathway, I sped like a deer, but 'twas no use—I knew instinctively I could never reach the end in time—I could see my finish.

The railroad bed had begun to fill in with earth at that end of the bridge, but I dared not jump yet, but literally flew into the heat and steam were upon my cheek, and with one mad leap over I went!

The next thing I knew I was lying alongside of the snorting and groaning engine.

The train-crew had stopped as soon as possible, backed up and carried me up the bank, and when I regained consciousness the engineer was bathing my face with water from the tank upon the big mogul that nearly proved my "Waterloo," and the fireman was making a hasty examination for broken limbs.

But the soft dirt in which I landed squarely upon my feet, was told, won the day, with nothing but a bad shaking up for me when I accepted the ultimatum: "To die trying or die without trying."

BOYHOODS OF FAMOUS MEN.

This department contains each week the story of the early career of some celebrated American. Watch for these stories and read them, boys. They are of the most fascinating interest.

Those already published are: No. 1—Buffalo Bill; No. 2—Kit Carson; No. 3—Texas Jack; No. 4—Col. Daniel Boone; Nos. 5 and 6—David Crockett; No. 7—General Sam Houston; Nos. 8 and 9—Lewis Wetzel; Nos. 10 and 11—Capt. John Smith; No. 12—Wild Bill; No. 13—Dr. Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout; No. 14—Buckskin Sam; No. 15—Seneca Adams ("Old Grizzly" Adams); No. 16—Pony Bob (Bob Haslam); No. 17—Major John M. Burke (Arizona Jack); No. 18—Kit Carson, Jr.; No. 19—Charles Emmett (Dashing Charlie).

No. 20—ALF SLADE.

There was great mystery and romance hanging over the remarkable men of the Border.

It seemed that the man who went to the frontier, be the circumstances to drive or call him then what they might, had it in him in some way to quickly show that he was above the ordinary individual.

If he took the downward path he very quickly showed that he could be an adept in crime, and if he selected a rough, perilous but honorable career, he soon made himself known and felt. Buffalo Bill won a name that will never die in the history of Borderland.

Wild Bill occupies a position in the deeds of Wild Western Heroes that will ever be recalled with interest.

Texas Jack, Buckskin Sam and a score of the Buckskin Heroes of the past two scores of years, made a place for them in the annals of the "Land of the Setting Sun."

Alf Slade was another of these characters, distinct in his way, but one who left a "record" in his peculiar life.

Alf Slade was almost as mysterious a man as was California Joe.

He was not a scout, guide, or an Indian fighter in the real sense of the word.

He appeared suddenly upon the Border from where no one knew. He said that his name was Alfred Slade, and such it doubtless was.

Of himself, his past, where he came from or why there he said nothing, and those who looked into the calm, clear-cut face of the man had not curiosity enough to ask him impudent questions.

He appeared upon the Kansas frontier first, then went to Colorado, to find gold; but he was known, as he had surprised the "toughs" of Leavenworth one day by chipping in where he thought he had a call to do so.

Alf Slade did not dress in buckskin and was not the typical borderman in appearance.

He dressed in black, wore a belt of arms beneath his coat, but very convenient to reach when needed, and his hat was a black slouch, his boots of cavalry make and his pants were tucked in the top.

His face had not a feature that was not clean-cut and expressive, and though not handsome, he yet was a conspicuous man, slender in form, wiry, but very quick of movement and strong beyond what his appearance indicated.

He rode well a black mare just suited to him. That he could shoot to dead center was soon discovered.

On the Coast he would be taken for a clergyman, for he looked it, and he was educated, never using border dialect, and a man of few words.

He was an expert gambler, yet played only when he needed money. Such was Alf Slade to the ordinary eye.

If those who knew him well were aware of more about him the fact never leaked out.

He first "introduced himself" as a man of nerve one evening when a man, under suspicion of having stolen a horse, who rode into Leavenworth, then a wild frontier settlement, was going to be hanged by a band of desperadoes, who took a fancy to the animal he rode, and after intended inheriting him by killing the rider, to gamble for him among themselves.

That they would have carried out their murderous intention there was no doubt when in the nick of time Alf Slade entered the room and saw the situation.

"That man shall not be murdered to please a lot of cut-throats!" he said, in his clear, decided voice.

"Does you intend ter chip inter this game, Alf Slade?" asked the leader of the gang.

"I do."

"Yer hasn't been axed, and if yer does it'll be your funeral."

It was the speaker's funeral, for he was drawing a weapon, as were those of the other desperadoes who had determined to hang the man to get his horse, as all present saw, yet dared not interfere.

Alf Slade's weapon was out and flashed quickly. His aim was deadly, and the lyncher fell, a bullet in the center of his forehead.

Two shots were fired at Slade by two more of the band, but they went astray, while as many shots by him found their mark.

"Shall this fight go on? It is for you two men to say," said Alf Slade.

"I hain't got no quarrel with you, Alf Slade!" growled one.

"Ner me, nuther!"

"Nor with this stranger, remember."

"No."

"Bury your pards, then, and I will pay the bill. Will you come with me?" and taking the stranger's arm, he led him from the saloon, while a silence like death fell upon the crowd left behind.

A new light had fallen upon Alf Slade—he was a surprise, had made himself felt in a community where just such a man was a popular idol.

"I know who you are, sir, for I have a good memory for faces—better than you have, for you do not recall me; but you did not steal that horse, yet more trouble may follow, so get out of this place."

"And desert you?"

"Never mind me—I can take care of myself; do as I tell you."

This was overheard to pass between Slade and the stranger, who quickly left Leavenworth.

And Alf Slade remained to maintain the stand he had taken and that was not the end, for two more deaths followed on the others.

The five Death Dealers were wiped out and Alf Slade had made himself feared by the desperadoes.

Soon after Alf Slade went to Colorado and roamed about the mining country there.

He seemed to have a mission to perform, known only to himself, and he went about it in his peculiar way.

Several of the worst characters in the mines, from time to time, came in contact with Slade, and it was always discovered that they had been the ones who sought trouble and found it.

Slade always remained master of the situation.

No one then thought of Slade as a Government officer, but it was later supposed that he was in the Secret Service, and looking up certain fugitive criminals.

If so, he certainly found not a few and his ways saved the Government the expense of a trial and hanging.

He was his own executioner.

When the Pony Express Line was started on the Overland Stage Trail, Alf Slade appeared on the run near Julesburg.

He was placed in charge of a division, having charge of both the stage line and the pony express riders for a certain distance.

The rough element hanging about the stations of the Overland sought to run them and interfere with the duties of the drivers, riders and stable hands, while the Indians also gave much trouble.

Slade's first move was to get rid of the redskins, and to do this he organized a company of these very roughs whom he had decided must go later.

"A good Indian fight will end a lot of them, and save future trouble," he said to his assistant division agent.

Mounting these men on the company's horses, he led them against the Indians, struck the village of the savages while the braves were off raiding, dealt them a terrible blow, the headed off the raiders and cut them up badly, covering retreat to less dangerous localities.

A number of Slade's "roughs" were killed, also, but those who were not took the value of their services as a reason for putting on airs and running the stations as they wished.

Feeling that this must be put an end to Alf Slade began work in deadly earnest.

He ordered the men to be called together, and taking a list of names from his pocket read them out and said:

"You men I have named have got just one hour to get out of this station, and if you do not leave, or leaving, return here to raise more trouble with my company's hands, you shall answer to me, and I will show no mercy, for I am here to run this division. I'll do it right."

Some went, but one man made a stand, and was shot dead.

Others "chipped in," and it was a hot time, but Slade killed two more men, his people backed him up, and the desperadoes were driven out.

It was about this time that Buffalo Bill appeared at Julesburg seeking to be a pony rider.

He was but a youngster, but Alf Slade had heard of him. He put him on, and never regretted it.

Wild Bill and Pony Bob were then pony riders also along the line, with other men who made a record for themselves.

It is said that Alf Slade was assassinated by a desperado years later, while also it is claimed that he died a natural death and is buried in Nebraska.

The real truth as to his death is as great a mystery as was the man's life, as so many conflicting stories are told; but Buffalo Bill always regarded him with the warmest friendship and speaks of him with sincere respect.

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THIS CONTEST WILL CLOSE MAY 1

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